SUFISTICATED

EXPLORING POST-TARIQA SUFI EXPRESSION AMONGST YOUNG BRITISH MUSLIMS

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In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

*From God, To God, For God*
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Abstract

Traditional Sufi tariqa formations are changing. Today religious people can engage with Sufism via the Internet or move between different Sufi-affiliated organisations. They no longer need to observe the traditions of a particular group or sect. Commitment can be optional.

This thesis draws upon ethnographic and netnographic research about Sufism in new spiritual organisations and on social media. It observes Sufism outside of the traditional master-disciple relationship. I explore the ways in which Sufi manifestations have diverged from traditional Sufi orders, and consider how religious authority is construed in offline and online contexts. I also focus in particular on naat khwaani (devotional recitation) and the purchase of Sufi paraphernalia. It becomes apparent that the Internet and social media is allowing some young Muslims, who express Sufi practice online, to be perceived as religious ‘celebrities’ and they are expected to uphold the responsibility of representing their faith.

The nuances of contemporary Sufi expression are explored through the prism of ‘post-tariqa Sufism’. This conceptual lens is used to analyse my findings, paired with theoretical underpinnings on everyday ‘lived religion’ and the rational choice theory. This thesis explores what the new Sufi phenomena tells us about religious engagement amongst young British Muslims, in relation to its wider religious and sociological landscape. This provides insights into the ways in which a youthful demographic of Muslims negotiate and reconstitute their religious traditions in alternative settings.

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Ultimately, the completion of this thesis serves to provide strength and hope to anyone trying to stay resilient amidst difficulties, “for what strikes the oyster shell does not damage the pearl” (Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi).
Glossary

A note on translation

A number of non-English terms have been used throughout this thesis. These words have mostly been italicised to indicate their non-English origin. Certain words are capitalised in some contexts to symbolise particular meanings, for example, shaykh is used to mean spiritual guide, but Shaykh with a capital ‘S’ is used as part of a title before a named individual. I have adopted the most conventional spellings and meanings and as an Urdu and Punjabi speaker, I have translated most of the words and phrases in these languages myself. I have omitted Peace Be Upon Him after every reference to the Prophet Muhammad due to readability, but may countless peace and blessings be unto Him.

Aalim (ulama pl.) Islamic scholar
Adab Etiquette, ‘good manners’, ‘beautiful approach’
Ahl-e Sunnah Sunni Umbrella identity meaning ‘People of the Prophet’s Way and the Community’
Amal Implementation of knowledge
Awliya’ Allah Friends of God, also referred as just ‘Awliya’
Aqida Islamic creed
Barakah Spiritual blessings
Barelvi South Asian Islamic reform movement founded by Imam Ahmad Raza Khan
Bay’ah To seek forgiveness from God and/or pledge allegiance to a spiritual guide
Bid’ah Innovation and/or deviation from ‘authentic Islam’ that is rooted in the Prophetic Sunnah
Faqir Sufi ascetic, mendicant or mystic
Faqr Poverty
Fikr Meditation
Fiqh Islamic jurisprudence
Futuwwa Ethical and moral training
Da’wah Islamic missionary work
Dargah Shrine of a spiritual guide or saint
Dars-i-nizami Studies in the Islamic sciences
Dar ul ‘ulum Islamic seminary
Deobandi South Asian Islamic renewal movement
Dhawq Spiritual ‘taste’
Dervish Sufi wanderer or seeker
Dhikr Remembrance of God
Dua Prayer
Faiz Spiritual virtues or blessings
Fatawa (fatwa sing.) Islamic legal rulings
Gyarvein sharif Commemorating the legacy of Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani
| **Hadith**       | Literature of traditions, reports on the Prophet’s customs and practices |
| **Hadra**       | A collective supererogatory ritual performed in some Sufi orders, where audiences stand, rocking back and forth during the *dhikr* |
| **Halal**       | Legally permissible according to Islamic jurisprudence |
| **Hamd**        | Praises of God |
| **Haram**       | Legally impermissible according to Islamic jurisprudence |
| **Hijab**       | Headscarf |
| **Idara**       | Religious or spiritual Islamic centre |
| **Ihsan**       | Perfection of worship |
| **‘Ilm**        | Sacred knowledge |
| **Jogi**        | Yogi |
| **Kalaam**      | Sufi mystical poetry |
| **Karamat**     | Miracles |
| **Khalifah**    | Deputy or successor of the spiritual guide |
| **Khanaqah**    | Sufi lodge or spiritual retreat |
| **Khateeb**     | The person who delivers the Friday sermon |
| **Khidma**      | Service to communities |
| **Khidmatul khalq** | Service to creation |
| **Khutbah**     | Friday sermon |
| **Langar**      | Free communal meal |
| **Laskars**     | Seamen |
| **Madhhhab**    | Four schools of jurisprudence: Maliki, Hanafi, Shafi'i or Hanbali |
| **Mahabbah**   | Love |
| **Mahram**      | A male relative with whom marriage would be impermissible |
| **Manqabat**    | Praises of revered Sufi saints and other religious figures |
| **Ma’rifat**    | Spiritual proximity or experience |
| **Mashraqi**   | Eastern |
| **Mawlid/Milad** | Celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, *also referred to as ‘Milad un Nabi’* |
| **Mehfil**      | Religious or spiritual gathering |
| **Munshid**     | Islamic song artist, munshida for female artist |
| **Mureed**      | Follower of a spiritual guide or saint |
| **Murshid**     | Urdu word meaning spiritual guide |
| **Naat**        | Islamic devotional poetry in praise of the Prophet Muhammad in South Asian languages |
| **Naat khwaan** | Reciter of naats |
| **Naat khwaani** | Practice of naat recitation |
| **Nasheed**     | Islamic song |
| **Niyyah**      | Intention |
| **Pir**         | South Asian and Farsi word meaning spiritual guide or saint |
| **Qalandar**    | Sufi wanderer |
| **Qasida**      | Islamic poetry in Arabic |
| **Qawwali**     | South Asian Sufi music |
| **Qur’an**      | Islamic holy book |
| **Saalik**      | Spiritual seeker |
| **Salafi**      | Middle-Eastern Islamic reform movement calling for the return to the original sources of Islam |
Salah  Congregational prayer
Seerah  Prophetic Biography
Silsilah  Unbroken spiritual chain
Shaykh  Spiritual guide or leader of a Sufi order
(Shuyookh pl.)
Shirk  Idolatry
Sunnah  The Prophetic example
Tajweed  Qur’an recitation
Ta’leem  Islamic education
Tarbiyah  Character development or moral nurturing
Tariqa  ‘The Way’ or Islamic esoterism, can also be defined as Islamic spirituality
Tariqa  Sufi order
Tasawwuf  Arabic word for Sufism
Tasbih  Rosary beads
Tazkiya  Purification of the heart
Ulama (aalim, sing.)  A group of Islamic scholars
Tawwasul  Visiting the tombs of saints to seek intercession from an intermediary
Urs  Death anniversary of a Sufi saint
Usul al-din  Principles of religion
Wahhabi  Middle-Eastern reform movement calling for literal interpretations of the Qur’an
Zawiya  Sufi lodge
Ziyyarah  Pilgrimage of sites and artefacts associated to the Prophet Muhammad
Zuhd  Asceticism or Renunciation
Chapter One – Introduction

1.0 Biography

“I wish there was no Heaven, I wish there was no Hell; so that we would really get to find out who truly loves God for the sake of God”

A few years ago, I learnt my great-great grandmother was an ascetic. She was known as a pious lady, who lived within a secluded hut in a remote village in Pakistan. She would isolate herself from the world, to direct her focus on worship. She abstained from food throughout the day and broke her fast at sunset with just milk and chapattis. I was facetiously told how this story would appeal to the ‘Sufi’ in me. This is because the ‘essence’ of Sufism, in teaching and practice, has always resonated with my desire to transcend a life of books and rituals to seek knowledge of the ‘self’ and ultimately, God. In later years, those who have learnt of her spiritual journey ascribe her the title ‘faqir’ (Sufi ascetic). But in our family, she was merely recognised as a pious lady, or mother, or grandmother. My great-great grandmother’s story led me to reflect on a quote by the tenth century al-Fushanji in the work of al-Hujwiri, ‘today Sufism is a name without a reality; but formerly it was a reality without a name’. I asked myself this one question: what makes someone a ‘Sufi’ today?

My own understanding and expression of Sufism has experienced significant changes over time. From a young age I have wanted to find the balance between Islamic law (sharia) and spirituality or ‘the way’ (tariqa). This search has led me to ask ontological questions, to engage with the literature of classic Muslim scholars on mysticism and philosophy, and to study and listen to Sufi poetry in English, Urdu, Punjabi and Farsi. I observed and interacted with diverse students, teachers, tariqas and denominations. I have spoken with different Sufi spiritual guides (shaykhs), attended various gatherings, studied a range of courses, participated in discussions, and enrolled on Islamic sciences (dars-i-nizami) programmes at different mosques. I have taken as teachers both Barelvi and Deobandi1 Sufis, and I have watched both

1 These terms will be defined in Chapter Two.
groups engage in intense debates. I have sat with the old and young to see whether their path to God would lead me to mine. I did not want to merely learn Islam, I wanted to ‘experience’ it.

My involvements have led me to study and examine different British Muslim communities, both consciously and unconsciously. I would mentally note the differences between the Sufism that I had read about in classical literature, the cultural Sufi practices I witnessed in South Asia, and the Sufi traditions I discovered in the UK. I reflected on the differences between the Sufism of my own parents and ancestors, and compare this to the Sufism I encountered amongst diverse contemporary British Muslim communities. Remarkably, I found I was not alone in my search. Like me, there were other young British Muslims exploring this diversity of spiritual and religious practice. They too were torn between being both Deobandi and Barelvi, scholarly and Sufi, orthodox and cultural. As a young Muslim woman, I have had the opportunity to observe and question new trends of Sufi expression amongst my own generation. On recognising most of these groups have received little attention in academic literature, I proposed a study of contemporary Sufi expression amongst young British Muslims.

During my Bachelors and Masters degrees, I have particularly focused on the study of classical and contemporary Sufism. I learnt how young British Muslims are exploring different means of acting upon their religious beliefs (Geaves 2000). They use their social context to re-interpret pre-existing understandings of their faith and to create new ways of displaying their religious identities (Hamid 2014). I chose to do some preliminary research to identify contemporary Sufi trends amongst my generation. It was during casual conversations amongst peers and via Internet searches that I found a plethora of new Sufi manifestations in offline and online spaces. I was intrigued, and felt that I had found an original avenue for academic exploration.

1.1 Defining Sufism

Sufism (Tassawuf) is the widely accepted name for Islamic mysticism or esotericism, through which one seeks consciousness of the One Reality (Schimmel 1975). The etymology of the
term is ‘suf’ (wool), therefore the early Sufis adopted this title as they wore woollen and patched clothing as part of their asceticism (Hill 2019, p.2). They aimed to spiritually purify themselves through poverty (faqr), asceticism/renunciation (zuhd), meditation (fikr) and remembrance of God (dhikr), in order to have a direct fellowship and encounter with God (Corbin 1993). Sufism is a religious way that has embraced both the wider “common” public and the minority “elevated” mystics (Arberry 1950, p.1). Throughout the ascetic-mystical tradition of Sufism certain Sufi leaders have claimed to know the Qur’anic mysteries through ‘unveiling’ (kashf) (Chittick 2000; Knysh 2017). Many Sufis insist their teachings are rooted in the Qur’an, Prophetic example (Sunnah) and the first two generation of Muslims (Knysh 2017, p.15). Sufis are sometimes referred to as the ‘friends of God’ (Awliya’ Allah) and many Sufis believe in annihilating (fan’a) their ‘self’ in their love of God. Perhaps some of the best historical biographies are contained in Fariduddin Attar’s book, ‘The Stories of the Saints’ (Tadhkiratu ‘l-Awliya),

“We can think of the teachings tales of Rabi’a, where she surprisingly upstages a renowned ascetic and scholar, or tries to burn down paradise and put out the fires of hell to secure the worship of God for her own sake. Or we can recall al-Hallaj, whose travels, political engagements, and public statements were so unpredictable as to be considered dangerously shocking, warranting his execution in the minds of political and religious authorities threatened by what he might say or do next” (Sharify-Funk et al. 2017, p.260).

Such examples have often rendered Sufism controversial, and Sufis have had to defend this by evidencing this tradition in relation to the sharia,

“There is a Hadith Qudsi (the holy utterances) that refers to God who says, “I was a hidden treasure, and I wanted to be known; hence I created the world.” Sufis endeavour to discover the hidden treasure by deciphering the signs of God. Did not say he is nearer to man than human’s jugular vein (Qur’an 50:16)? The Quran also states reciprocal love between God and humanity. However, the notion of reciprocal love between God and humans is sharply objected to by the scholars or normative tradition. According to this view, love means loving God’s commands, that is, strict obedience (Alam 2017, p.226).
Sufism is not monolithic. It has never resided in one “homeland” or “classical” era, (Green 2012, p.xi). It embraces social, educational, philosophical, moral and creative practices, through poetry and provisions for vulnerable communities. I adopt this nuanced definition of Sufism,

‘Sufism is “Islam in miniature” with the major features of Sufism being present in Islam and vice versa. This being the case, Sufism, like Islam, comprises all the major components of a religious tradition, namely teaching/discourses and practices, communities, institutions, and leaders’ (Knysh 2017, p.14).

Through the teachings of the early Sufis, Sufism grew in popularity in the ninth and tenth centuries, and spread rapidly across the globe (Al-Sulami and al-Jerrahi 1983). From the eleventh century, Sufi orders (tariqas) were established, to systematise Sufi groups and further the teachings of spiritual guides (referred to as shaykh, pir or murshid). This gathered all those who identified with Sufism (Geaves 2000). There are central tariqas, such as the Naqshbandi, Qadiri, Chishti, Rifa’iyya and Suhrawardi Orders, and sub-tariqas that are smaller derivatives, e.g. the Qalandariyya and Malamatiyya. Initially Sufism was considered a spiritually elect tradition and was only taught to certain qualified individuals (Ernst 1985, p.44).

“Initially, tasawwuf was intellectually and socially mostly represented by artisans with individualistic tendencies without a sophisticated organizational and theoretical superstructure, which emerged only gradually. Motivated by discontent with the political and social situation around the ruling class and their legitimators, i.e. most of the orthodox scholars and jurists, it was also a movement against the establishment of legalism, which came to rule the lives of common Muslims. Outwardly tasawwuf was quietist and regressive, but inwardly it was powerful and activist...” (Malik 2006, p.5).

However, ‘more elaborate rules and organisational structures evolved over time, with the shaykh at the head, several khalifahs under him in charge of “district or town sections,” some with their own sub-leaders beneath them’ (Bennett 2017b, p.37 italics and quotation marks as found in original). The shaykh provides religious and spiritual direction to his followers (mureeds). Before his death, the shaykh will normally elect a successor (khalifah) so that there
is an unbroken spiritual chain (silsilah) (Gilliat-Ray 2010, p.93). The mureeds pledge spiritual allegiance to the shaykh and the succession of the shaykh is usually through nomination (by their predecessor) or through birth (Bennett 2017b, p.40). As part of the tariqa, religious schools, shrines (dargah) and Sufi lodges (zawiya/khanqahs) were also formed, to further the teachings and gather more followers of the Sufi order, and to venerate the deceased saint(s).

The regional groups responded to Sufi thought in different and varied manifestations, which have continued until the present day (Trimingham 1971).

“On the one side, Sufism is glossed as an elaborate and coherent neo-Platonic theosophy of mystical realities: Sufis in this construction were historically renowned mystics, now long dead, whose writings and poetry today inspire mostly middle-class or elite urban circles, seeking ‘new’ religious experiences (Gilsenan 1982, pp.244–246). On the other side are the cults of saints or marabouts whose tombs are the focus of magical, superstitious ‘folk’ or ‘syncretic’ practices by the ignorant (eclectic, tolerant) masses” (Werbner and Basu 1998, p.4).

Sufism in South Asia has been particularly prominent, holding one of the largest Muslim populations in the world and the greatest concentration of Sufis, saints and shrines, influencing many contemporary Sufi orders (Bennett and Ramsey 2012).

“Followers of Sufi tradition do not always refer to themselves as ‘Sufis’; “this re-absorption of an unmarked Sufism into a large conception of Islam in general marks in many respects a return to the older sense of Sufi tradition as inseparable from the Muslim faith” (Green 2012, p.227).

A Sufi may also be referred to as a seeker (saalik), wanderer (dervish or qalandar), yogi (jogi), mystic or mendicant (faqir).

Sufi allegorical poems have been a long withstanding tradition to share and preserve Sufi teachings. Perhaps one of the most well-known of these is the ‘Conference of the Birds’ (Mantiq al-Tair) by Fariduddin Attar. This story may somewhat seem displaced in a sociological study of Sufism, but yet the key foundations of this spiritual tradition are often
found in the historical and philosophical Sufi poems, where the poet laments his separation from God. The five thousand-line Persian poem is one of the longest Sufi poems which metaphorically recounts the relationship between Sufi master and disciple, illustrating the significance of spiritual experience (*ma’rifah*) and sapiential knowledge or direct experience of the heart with the love of God. This is referred to as (spiritual) ‘taste’ (*dhawq*).

The poem succinctly summarises the key Sufi principles,

> “Various mystical states (*ahwal*) and spiritual stations (*maqamat*) were to mark the path (*tariqa*) starting with repentance, i.e. conversation to a new way of life, and through different other stations reaching gnosis (*ma’rifah*), and ultimately leading to the annihilation in God (*fana*). Both states and stations can be considered as vehicles for acquiring truth (*haqiqa*) considered as being one of the three levels of cosmic evolution — the other two being exoteric (*shar’ia*) and esoteric (*tariqa*) respectively” (Malik 2006, p.5).

The poem maps the difficulties in the path to God, and how this cannot be attained without the guidance of a *shaykh*. The conference comprises of different species of birds (the disciples), led by the hoopoe bird (the spiritual master). As he encourages the birds to follow him on the journey of the seven valleys (symbolising the successive stages of the human soul in attaining spiritual enlightenment), many of the birds bring forth their complaints, showing the dominance of their carnal desires (the *nafs*) and their distraction in pursuit of the love of the world. The hoopoe is disconcerted by their fatuity and unravels their baseless claims as nothing short of complaints, greed and excuses. The hoopoe tells them that they must undertake this arduous journey to meet the mystery Simurgh, in order to be led in truth. In the end, only thirty birds take part in the journey and the readers are taken on this path of the stories and lessons of previous Sufi mystics, all of whom gave great sacrifices in the pursuit of the Divine. Eventually, once the birds meet the Simurgh: they realise the Simurgh is them, and they are the Simurgh (*si* meaning thirty, *murgh* meaning birds, in Farsi). The birds find self-annihilation in their love for the Simurgh, just as the Sufi annihilates the self for the Divine.
Sufism is sometimes considered a form of universal spirituality as it enables one to fulfil their personal aspirations to faith. It is also contested by critics who consider it an aberration (Sharify-Funk et al. 2017). “Sufism, no matter how fancifully construed and emplotted, was and still is quite real for its followers, opponents, and students, both inside and outside the Sufi tradition” (Knysh 2017, p.3). Contemporary Sufi expressions are multidimensional and diverse. Today, many Sufi movements are transcultural and transnational. They are no longer confined to their places of origin, and the Sufi teachings are rejuvenated by followers throughout the Muslim world, and within Muslim diasporas (Gabriel and Geaves 2014b).

Sufism has often been subject to criticism by followers of the Salafi and Wahhabi movements for wrongful innovation (bid’ah) and deviation from ‘authentic Islam’ that is rooted in the Prophetic Sunnah (Ridgeon 2015, p.3). Some ideas associated with Sufism are considered idolatrous (shirk), such as, visiting the tombs of saints or to seek intercession (tawwasul) from an intermediary besides God (Khan 2006, pp.19–20). Sufism has also been criticised in more contemporary sources, as discussed in a more recent study,

“Some reject the doctrine of unity-of-being, some reject the role played by teachers and the teacher-student relationship involved in this; others condemn visiting shrines as un-Islamic. Some denounce Sufi teachers as charlatans, who take advantage of their disciples. Some, indeed, are very wealthy. Claims that Sufi masters can heal the sick, read minds, fly through the air or perform any number of supernatural acts, also attracts criticism” (Bennett 2017b, p.4).

However, many Sufis have reclaimed this tradition by reinforcing its connection with the Sunnah and emphasising the adherence to the sharia as a prerequisite to the tariqa.

### 1.2 Spirituality

Sufism may also be referred to as ‘tariqa’, which some may translate as ‘spirituality’ or spiritual traditions. Many modern understandings of Sufism in the West are an invention of Orientalist scholarship in the late-eighteenth century, who “couched the original Sufi ideas and practices into the cultural codes intelligible to their own societies” and “tended to detach it from the rest of the Muslim tradition” (Ernst 1992; Knysh 2017, pp.3–4). Modern Western
scholarship that has added the ‘-ism’, suggests Islamic mysticism is a distinctive category that separates legalistic Islam and Sufi traditions (Khan 2006, p.1). The Orientalist approach,

“...tends to ignore the existence of religious pluralism and reduces Islamic tradition to monolithic essentialism, thereby silencing the multi-vocality of the Muslim articulations. But there is also the other side of Orientalism: in addition to the essentialization of Islam as fundamentalism, there is also a long-standing romantic idealization of Eastern spirituality” (Malik 2006, p.1).

Therefore, most Muslims prefer to adopt the Arabic term ‘tasawwuf’ to more accurately define the spiritual dimensions of Islam.

Definitions of the term ‘spirituality’ are diverse and contested. Many understandings of the term ‘spirituality’ were once classified under the term ‘New Age’ (Watts 2017, p.67). It is often associated with a sense of fulfilment, experiences of, and with religion, or a Divine Power, and a social imagination of the ways we apply meaning and make sense of the world (Taylor 2004; Taylor 2007; Watts 2019). Muslims and Christians can use this term in expressing their devotion or relationship with God, or incorporating mysticism, whereas it can also be used “to express commitment to a deep truth that is to be found within what belongs to this world” (Heelas et al. 2005, pp.5–6). The connotations of spirituality can be more positive in comparison to the perception towards religion,

“Religion is often associated with formal rituals, organised beliefs and practices, community and institutions, and even negative connotations of being dogmatic, inflexible and leading to acts of fundamentalism; whereas spirituality is associated with positive qualities of being individualistic, peaceful, and a personal quest to know the deeper meanings of life and understanding the self” (Rinallo et al. 2012, p.3).

Sufism is imbued in Islam’s spiritual tradition but does not lexically translate to ‘spirituality’ as understood by many sociologists of religion. As discussed earlier in the chapter, it is both a distinctive tradition and a part of the esoteric dimensions of Islam. In this study I will define Islamic spirituality as faith that is embodied, which may overlap definitions of Sufism and
‘lived Islam’ (Dessing et al. 2013). I will explore the different definitions of spirituality and Sufism through the meanings prescribed by my interlocutors. There are people whose practices are ‘Sufi-flavoured’ but may not have a formal association with Sufism or traditional Sufi orders (Bennett 2017a, pp.4–5).

1.3 The British Muslim youth

Like other faith communities young British Muslims are heterogenous and they apply their faith in different ways. “The term ‘British Muslims’ [is] an indigenised identity intended to anchor their faith into the cultural context of Britain” (Hamid 2017a, p.3). In some contexts, this “principally reinforces local ethno-national and diasporic entanglements with people, place, language, custom, ancestry and so on” (McLoughlin 2017, p.424). Young Muslims’ identities “are not static but evolving in a continuous of ‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’, and show how their lifestyle choices are remade in the context of wider national and global dynamics” (Hamid 2017a, p.11).

Young people in Britain are often seen as casual factors for “societal fragmentation and declining participation in community activities” (Hemming and Madge 2018, p.199). The relationship between young Muslims and Islam is of growing interest to policy officials and academics, due to discourses surrounding religious extremism, violence and their interpretation of faith (Peucker and Akbarzadeh 2014; Inge 2016). Young Muslims are faced with challenges of destigmatising a narrative of radicalisation, whilst also experiencing a heightened climate of Islamophobia and managing their ethno-religious identities in an increasingly pluralistic, yet post-secular environment (Abbas 2004; Habermas 2008). Alongside this public scrutiny, like other young people in Britain today, they are faced with the same pressures of education, finding employment and managing relationships, in the face of an increasingly connected global world and socio-political changes (Catto 2014, p.15).

The Internet is global and shapes the multifaceted ways young Muslims transmit and engage in religion (Bunt 2000; Hamid 2017b; Bunt 2018). The majority of Internet usage on a daily basis comes from young people, who also lead the statistics on the use of mobile phone, social
networking, streaming music and selling goods online. The Internet and social media are ubiquitous which is facilitating young people to access and disseminate religion quickly. In the UK, 87% of all adults used the Internet daily in 2019, with an additional 4% of adults using it at least weekly but not daily. Among all adults, 84% had used the Internet ‘on the go’ in 2019, using a mobile phone, smartphone, laptop, tablet or handheld device. In 2019, the most common type of device used to access the internet on the go was a mobile phone or smartphone at 79%. Clothing is amongst the highest purchased items online. From these statistics, one can also recognise the different ways religion may operate, via social networking, music and shopping. For researchers, these are important elements to consider when studying lived religion or young Muslims’ everyday religious practices, as these media shape their connection with faith (see Campbell 2010). My study will take these diverse factors into account. A more detailed overview of these interconnecting themes will be provided in Chapter Two.

1.4 Thesis outline

The *raison d’etre* of this study is to understand what new forms of Sufi expression have emerged amongst young British Muslims, and the reasons why, vis-à-vis its sociological landscape. This research will focus on everyday, lived religious practices in non-official institutions (McGuire 2008; Dessing 2013; Watts 2018b), beyond organised religion (i.e. mosques and Sufi orders), that previous researchers may have overlooked, to see how Sufism is being reconstructed in different settings. It will further help refine and produce a more comprehensive definition of ‘post-tariqa Sufism’, which will be used a conceptual tool to analyse the findings in this thesis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

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2 Office for National Statistics.
In this chapter I identify the key conceptual and theoretical frameworks which underpin this study, by evaluating the existing literature on Muslims and Sufism in Britain and in the sociology of religion. By exploring the gaps in the literature, this surveying exercise identifies the key themes that are pertinent in this study and helps formulate my key research questions.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Here I discuss the epistemological and methodological approach to help answer my research questions. I return to the theories which underpin this study, and outline the ethnographic and netnographic methods that are used to collate and analyse my datasets.

Chapter Four: Mapping the Contemporary Sufi Scene

This chapter explores the multifaceted ways Sufism is accessed and created in offline and online contexts, conveying the different ways Sufi expression is being shifted to the virtual realm. This is significant as it updates the literature on Sufism in Britain, as these forms of Sufi manifestations have received little, or no, attention in the academic literature. Through this mapping exercise, I choose two offline and two online forms of Sufism which will best address my research questions.

Chapter Five: The Production of Sufism

I draw upon my qualitative and online research data analysis methods to frame my two key findings chapters. The first chapter introduces the myriad ways Sufism is produced and the religious actors who are involved in creating new avenues for young British Muslims to access Islam and spirituality.

Chapter Six: The Consumption of Sufism
Having shown the ways in which these new forms of Sufi expression are departing from the formal religious infrastructures, I observe its impact and reception amongst diverse audiences.

Chapter Seven: Discussion and Contribution

This chapter examines the ways in which I have answered each of my research questions and where I have embedded my original contributions in relation to the gaps in the literature. It also assesses any limitations that arise from this study and suggests implications for future research.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The final chapter provides a reflective account of the research processes and links back to the introductory chapter, noting to what extent this study has impacted my own understanding of Sufism.
Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter examines some of the key academic debates, as well as the social and historical developments, that have shaped the current frameworks for the study of Muslims and Sufism in Britain. I argue the existing research is yet to explore several themes, which are central to understanding some of the contemporary forms of Sufi expression amongst young British Muslims. The analysis of the literature will highlight where there is a lack of research, for which my original contribution to this field is both timely and essential. This will help form my theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

I evaluate the literature on Muslims and Sufism in Britain, as well as the social and religious changes in the UK, over the last fifty years. I survey the sociology and history behind the development of, and the changes in, spiritual and religious movements in the UK. I further examine the role of new media and the digital realm in intensifying these trends. This helps our understanding of the sociological environment in which Sufism is embedded and how this had led to the development of new Sufi manifestations by a youthful demographic of British Muslims. This critical review will chart the central themes in the research by previous academics and the methods they have deployed, whilst simultaneously noting the limitations in their studies. Lastly, the analysis of the literature will help refine my research questions.

2.1 Muslims in Britain

Extensive research on the historical and demographical features of Muslim communal settlement in Britain has informed our understanding of the successive development of British Muslim identities and today’s intrareligious diversity. Scholars have noted how prior to the Second World War, many Muslim arrived to the United Kingdom as a result of British imperial history, and Britain’s socio-political contact with Muslim-majority countries (Dahya 1974; Ansari 2004; Gale and Hopkins 2009). Another factor was the geography – the First World War brought soldiers and former seamen (lascars) who moved inwards to cities such as, London, Cardiff, Hull, Middlesbrough, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Southampton from
seaports (Visram 1986; Ballard 2003; Gilliat-Ray 2010; Chatterji and Washbrook 2014). During this period, most Muslims arrived as sojourners.

After the Second World War, the reconstruction of Britain led to an influx of migrants, largely from the West Indies and South Asia, who undertook unskilled and low-paid labour (Werbner 1990b; Gilliat-Ray 2010). They experienced economic disadvantage, poor housing facilities, and discrimination. Many of those who arrived from the Indian subcontinent came as single males for personal economic advancement. Their aim was to earn enough money to send back to their home countries, for their families to remain financially secure. At a similar period, Turkish Cypriots were migrating for both economic motives and due to civil unrest in the region, as were Muslim students coming from the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana to fulfil educational aspirations (Gilliat-Ray 2010, p.46). Those coming from Iran and the Middle East migrated for similar reasons, many arriving as traders or skilled professionals for financial increase and investment opportunities. They were also escaping the political upheaval at the time (such as, The Iranian Revolution 1978-79).

Policies on immigration also contributed to Muslim settlement in Britain. Immigration from Muslim-majority countries was fairly low throughout the 1950s but rose considerably in 1961. This was due to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962), and the family unification clause in the Immigration Bill (1964), which also contributed to chain migration (Ballard 2003; Ansari 2007; Nanda and Rajan 2016). In the early 1970s, primary migration became difficult because of the Immigration Bill (1971), which sometimes resulted in aspirants using other strategies, such as marriage and unauthorised conduits, including smuggling, overstaying on visas and forged documentation (Nanda and Rajan 2016, p.184). In 1961, with changes in immigration laws and family circumstances, many women and children joined their male relatives. With the settlement of women and children going back to their home countries was no longer an option for many early migrants. This was particularly the case for families with several children, and for those whose youngsters had begun their education.\footnote{National Archives, The Cabinet Papers. ‘Commonwealth Immigration control and legislation’ \url{https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/commonwealth-immigration-control-legislation.htm}.

\footnote{National Archives, The Cabinet Papers. ‘Commonwealth Immigration control and legislation’}
This resulted in a shift from temporary male residence to permanent family settlement, and a concerted effort to develop facilities for families and community infrastructures (Gilliat-Ray 2010). Muslims in Britain now saw themselves as settlers, as opposed to sojourners. As shown in the report on Muslims in Britain by Ansari (2007), from the late 1970s, alongside makeshift mosques, umbrella bodies and Muslim community organisations were set up by locals to cater for welfare needs and religious ceremonies. A patchwork of communities and organisations had emerged that reflected particular national, ethnic and linguistic imprints. By the mid-1980s, these organisations were more active, and Muslims gained more confidence to deal with other areas of public life and political representation (Ansari 2007). Having mapped briefly the historical developments of Muslim communities in Britain, the following sections will discuss how their religious identities became salient.

2.1.1. The Rushdie affair - from ‘ethnic’ to ‘religious’

Prior to the events of the late 1980s, Muslims in Britain were largely seen in terms of ethnicity as opposed to being a distinctive religious group. This was evident in academic studies before 1988, which classified British Muslims as part of the ‘Asian’ category (Quraishi 2005) and primarily focused on issues concerning race, culture, and ethnicity, for example, Anwar (1979), Dahya (1974), Khan (1977) and Watson (1977) (for more on policy, research and politics during this period see May and Modood (2001) and McLoughlin (2006)). Additionally, state policy (e.g. Rampton Report 1981, Swann Report 1985) overlooked religious pluralism. Instead, it saw culture and ethnicity as synonymous, acknowledging an increase of ‘ethnic minorities’, and recognising society as becoming more culturally-diverse and ‘multicultural’ (Bauman 1999; May and Modood 2001; Race 2001).

The Rushdie affair contributed to the increased visibility of Muslims in Britain. The publication of Salman Rushdie’s book ‘The Satanic Verses’ in 1988 caused extreme public outrage, as it manipulated Islamic history as fiction. Rushdie was intentionally provocative and was accused of blasphemy in denigrating the Prophet Muhammad. This led to public protests, with some Muslims burning copies of his book and lobbying the British government to ban sales of his
publication, who in turn requested them not to isolate themselves from the ‘host society’ (Asad 1990, p.455). The Rushdie affair facilitated the development of frameworks which perceived ‘British Muslims’ as a distinct socio-religious category. Thus, new academic research and state policies emerged to understand Muslim communities. This also changed the discourse on multiculturalism, once viewed as part of the solution, “as an explanatory or even causal factor for a so-called breakdown in ‘community cohesion’, leading to calls for policies aimed at assimilating minorities into the mainstream of ‘British’ culture and values” (Cowden and Singh 2011, p.344). Academics noted how British Muslims negotiated and contributed to wider social changes, through an increased engagement of community organisations (Modood 1990; Parekh 1990; Lewis 1994; Kuhn 1996).

Religion was now seen as a form of communal identity, with political significance. Over the 1990s, this led to the creation of national representative bodies and organisational efforts to manage the faith communities (such as the UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs [UKACIA] and the Muslim Council of Britain [MCB]) (Akhtar 2009; Zavos 2009). By the mid-1990s, there were approximately 839 mosques and a further 950 Muslim organisations (Peach and Vertovec 1997).

2.1.2. The development of British Muslim identities

Prior to the Rushdie affair religious identities were rarely considered salient. In a study of Mirpuris in Bradford, Khan (1977, p.74) alluded to the possibility of a ‘pan-Asian’ identity amongst the youth at that time, as they “will not accept the prejudices internal to the Pakistani population and between Asians of different regional or religious origin” nor the “stereotypes circulating in the majority society”. However, there were no detailed accounts of religious movements amongst South Asian groups, as noted in previous research,

“Most discussions of the South Asian presence in Britain paid only the most perfunctory attention to the religious dimension of the settlers’ personal lives, and still less to the extent to which Islam might provide them with a vehicle for the expression and mobilisation of their collective interests” (Lewis 1994, p.58).
The development of Muslim identities came as a result of discourses on Britishness in the late 1980s (Ansari 2004; Lewis 2007). For many British Muslims, a primary obligation to religion was often more significant than nationality and this primacy of religious identity tended to surface with second generation (British-born) Muslims. The Rushdie affair not only changed perceptions of Muslims, but also became important in the emergence of [British] ‘Muslim’ identities, whereby they would simultaneously negotiate and preserve their cultural identities (Modood 2010; Sammut and Sartawi 2012). This also led to diasporic communities confronting their local invisibility, through public acts of mobilisation and hospitality, by contributing cultural goods, through social action, art and music (Werbner 2002b, p.128). These practices combined ethnic cultures and religious teachings, which were sometimes adapted to the British context.

Where earlier researchers studied diasporic communities as homogenous ethnic groups, later research identified ‘super-diversity’ (e.g. intracommunity and intercultural diversity) and hybrid identities (Peach and Vertovec 1997; Vertovec 2007; Vertovec 2014). This blurred the notion of ethnic and religious essentialism amongst British Muslims (Werbner 2002). Subsequent findings show many young British Muslims are proponents of dynamic and syncretic ‘multiple identities’, influenced by a variety of cultural and social factors, and able to bring together their ‘Muslimness’ and ‘Britishness’ (Joly 1995; Ali 2008; Hamid 2011; Cheruvallil-Contractor 2012). I suggest, as part of the ongoing development of British Muslim identities, young Muslims contribute to the formation of new forms of Islamic cultural identity. The evolution of British Muslim identities in the diaspora is reflected through new forms of religious mobilisation, arts, religious music and their sartorial choices (see Lewis 2013; Lewis 2015 on dress cultures). This enables them to merge religious beliefs with cosmopolitan lifestyles.

2.1.3. Muslims in public discourse and policy making

Having discussed the development of British Muslim identities, I move on to discuss the impact of representation. Due to several landmark events, Muslims in Britain have had to create, defend and negotiate their identities as ‘British Muslims’. Amongst these incidents are
the race riots in Burnley, Oldham and Bradford (2001) and the terror-related attacks of 9/11 and 7/7. This led to policy investigations (e.g. Cantle Report 2001, Casey Review 2015), and an increase in academic research on British Muslims to understand the diverse communities, and the causes of fundamentalism, radicalisation and terrorism. This was further augmented by the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) agenda (2007) and reformed counter-terrorism legislation (2015).

Media studies have shown that Islam and Muslims in Britain are largely portrayed negatively in public discourse (Poole 2002; Allen 2016). This research has looked at issues surrounding representation and language, where negative connotations have shaped public perception (Baker 2006; Poole 2002). This has placed British Muslims under public scrutiny and suspicion. The term ‘Islamophobia’ was initially defined in the Runnymede Trust Report (1997) to account for the increasing anti-Muslim prejudice. Subsequent studies on Islamophobia have provided an insight into the experiences of Muslim diasporic communities in Britain, particularly where they are subject to discrimination (Abbas 2005; Gabriel et al. 2004). More recent research has been conducted by the cross-parliamentary body (APPG) on British Muslims (2018), who launched a public inquiry into Islamophobia and generated a comprehensive definition, “Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness”.  

The representation of British Muslims, in policy and public discourse, is one explanation for the development of new forms religious expression through popular culture and new media, such as the Internet and social media. Young British Muslims now use these platforms for alternative lifestyle cultures, which combat stereotypes of Islam being monolithic, ‘unprogressive’, ‘backwards,’ and antithetical to life in Britain (Allen 2013, p.33).

2.2 The transfer of Islam in Britain

Having discussed the historical context of Muslim settlement in Britain and the development of British Muslim identities, I move on to discuss the transfer of religious movements. The

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majority of Sunni Muslims follow one of the four schools of jurisprudence (*madhhab*): Maliki, Hanafi, Shafi’i or Hanbali (Melchert 1997). Amongst the Hanafi school the two most prominent divisions are between the Deobandis and Barelvis in South Asia. Due to limited space, in this section I cannot cover the diverse religious denominations. I have therefore focused on the Deobandi and Barelvi traditions, as two of the most influential movements to transmit religious and Sufi traditions to young Muslims in the diaspora (King 1997, p.136).

### 2.2.1 The Deobandi movement

The Deobandi movement emerged out of Britain’s political intervention in the Indian subcontinent, in particular from the Indian Rebellion of 1857 against the rule of the British East India Company. The Deobandis wanted to ‘renew’ religious practice and reassert intellectual prominence where Islamic political power was in decline (Ingram 2009). Although early Deobandi teachers have been critical of certain Sufi practices, they incorporated a more sober Sufism in their tradition (as opposed to ecstatic forms of Sufism that are found in certain Sufi practices). In a thorough account by Metcalf (2002), she notes how the Deobandis used Sufism to reinforce their reformist message, and insist on the Sunnah as the measure of approved belief and action. Geaves’ (2015) chapter further addresses the common misconception that Deobandis are critical of Barelvis because of their Sufi beliefs and practices. In his work, Geaves references the classical *Fatawa Rahimiyyah*, where the scholars and clerics of Deoband were referred to as Sufis, who combine the teachings of each of the Sufi orders. He also notes how:

“The contestation with the Barelvis is not to be seen in the context of an outright condemnation of Sufism or its practices. Indeed, the questions posed to the *ulama* of Deoband revealed a more nuanced position to South Asian Sufi practices than is normally believed” (Geaves 2015, p.209).

This study provides an overview of the contemporary Deobandi-Sufi position, although more substantive ethnographic research is needed on Sufism amongst Deobandi communities in Britain.
In the UK, the Deobandi movement has been expanded and sustained through the creation of mosques and Islamic seminaries (\textit{dar ul 'ulum}), as well as the missionary offshoot the Tablighi Jama’at. Deobandi teachings were preserved in these religious infrastructures which produced young learned scholars ('\textit{aalim}; ulama - plural) often through the teaching of the \textit{dars-i nizami} programme,

\textit{“Dars-i nizami” curriculum is considered inviolate and is heavily endowed with symbolic meaning among Deobandis. In practice, this is maintained through a system in which a teacher supplies a certificate (\textit{sanad}) stating the books successfully studied (usually rote learning and memorization rather than critical investigation). Permission (\textit{ijaza}) is then given to the student to teach the acquired books, and through this process over the generations, chains of transmission (\textit{silsila}) have been established between teachers and their students...The \textit{dars-i nizami} curriculum guarantees that any efforts to modernize would be received with resistance and that sensitivity would be required in any efforts by outsiders to recommend or promote reform. The \textit{dars-i nizami} curriculum is also intrinsic to the Deobandis’ sense of being unique”} (Geaves 2012, pp.317–318, italics in original).

Such courses have helped maintain the transmission of religious traditions amongst Muslim \textit{ulama}, who will be discussed later on in this chapter.

\subsection*{2.2.2 Barelvis}

The Barelvi (also referred to as ‘Barelwi’) Muslims are followers of Imam Ahmed Raza Khan (1856-1921), who founded the movement in Bareilly in the 1880s (Metcalf 2009). Khan’s movement intended to revive the Sunnah as embodied in the Qur’an and literature of traditions (Hadith), as he believed people had lapsed from the Prophetic traditions. Consequently, he took the duty of reminding Muslims go back to the ‘ideal’ way (Sanyal 1996). The Barelvis prefer to adopt the umbrella term ‘Ahl as-Sunnah W’al Jamaah’, ‘People of the Prophet’s Way and the Community’ (Esposito 2003). This has allowed them to identify as the ‘true’ Sunni Muslims, as they follow practices that are legitimised throughout the Muslim world (Geaves 1996a).
The Ahl as-Sunnah are considered by many Sunni Muslims as the “saved sect”. This idea is based on the Hadith narrated from Anas bin Malik that the Prophet Muhammad’s nation will split into seventy-two, all of which will be in Hell apart from one, which is the main congregation (considered as the Ahl as-Sunnah wa Jamaat), (see Sunan Ibn Majah 3993, Book 36, Hadith 68). Hazen (2016, p.47) rightly describes how this label “accounts for numerous Muslims...who hold moderate, spiritual beliefs and may consult a shaykh periodically, but are not involved in the institutional form of Sufism. It represents a cultural practice of Sufism”. I will use this definition when applying this term.

In Sanyal’s (1996) extensive study on Barelvi traditions, she provides a detailed account of the history which surrounds Khan, his students and the Barelvi movement, referencing key textual sources, such as early legal rulings (fatawa). However, one limitation of her study, which she too recognises, is her work does not provide a clear insight into how communal affiliations to the Barelvi movement were formed from outside of Khan’s students. In a more recent study, Gugler (2015) refers to modern Barelvis as the ‘Neo-Barelwiyyat’, a global movement characterised by charismatic and eloquent preachers and other agents on the Internet and television (such as Dawat-i Islami’s TV channel, ‘Madani Channel’).

In the UK, the Barelvi movement was sustained through the arrival of Sufi shaykhs and religious scholars (ulama), who were able to gather followers of tariqa and continue Khan’s teachings. Early sojourners and migrants would transform local houses, as well as rooms in mills and factories, into places of worship. However, in an early study of Barelvi communities in Britain, Geaves (1996) notes the occasional friction between Sufi pirs and the ulama.

The Barelvi-Sufi tradition was in danger of being abandoned by second generation South-Asian British Muslims, in exchange for better organised movements like the Salafis (Geaves 2000). However, this tradition was revived by the same operational modes utilized by their competitors (Salafis), such as educational facilities, seminaries and English-speaking teachers (Hamid 2016). Hamid coined this turn to traditional Islam ‘muscular Sufism’ as young Muslims

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7 Amongst these is the elaborate Fatawa-e Rizviyya.
turned to largely convert *shaykhs* from the UK and USA to revitalise Sufism from the cultural traditions of their parents (Hamid 2016, p.129).

2.2.3 The transmission of Islamic traditions

The *ulama* have played a key role in the transmission of Islam, from first and second generation Muslims, to third and fourth generations. In a study by Lewis (1994), he notes there was an inter-generational tension in transmitting Islam, as earlier scholars did not reach out to the British-born youth. However, the youth recognised their diversity and arranged social initiatives to meet their needs, by requesting English-speaking Imams for example. In later research, Lewis (2007) identifies that although many British-educated *ulama* have successfully negotiated multiple worlds, they too fall into two separate categories: cosmopolitan and transnational. Unlike the cosmopolitan, the transnational *ulama* still speak in foreign languages and are rarely recognised beyond their communities.

Jacobson’s (1998) study has also observed the role of the *ulama* and the problems of religious authority amongst British-Muslim communities. She notes there are differences in how Islam is transmitted amongst South Asian Imams and British-born Muslims. She points to cultural divergences as to why Imams from South Asia are sometimes unable to communicate Islamic teachings in a way that is contextually relevant. However, these studies make no attempt to consider the intergenerational transmission of Sufism in the UK.

2.2.4 Young British Muslims

The literature survey thus far shows that young Muslims are often vanguards of social and religious change. Quantitative data on young British Muslims also supports how this demographic are, and will continue to be, influential in shaping the future of Islam in Britain. Research has shown how more than half a million Muslims are under the age of sixteen and

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8 For instance, by engaging outside of closed communities, with the media, police, social workers, professionals, chaplains and wider society.
approximately fifty per cent of the Muslim population are under twenty-five\(^9\) (Lewis 2007; Gilliat-Ray 2010).

Alongside their religious identities, young British Muslims are shaped by the cultures that surround them (Lewis 2007). Thus, they are more likely to negotiate their identity in “complex, contextual, relational and provisional ways” (Dwyer 1998, p.54). Young British Muslims have used media networks as a space to explore British Muslim identities, by offering positive images of Islam, and dealing with key issues they face in their private and public lives (Ansari 2007). An example of this is Q-News. More recent British Muslim media outlets and channels include 5Pillars, Ummah Channel and Islam Channel. Ansari (2007, p.14) writes how young British Muslims shed any ‘cultural baggage’ which they do not see as relevant in Britain, because religion should be placed above ethnicity. My research will observe to what extent changes in Muslim youth religio-cultural production and identities reflect this claim (Hamid 2017b).

2.2.5 Lived Religion, Strategic and Tactical Religion

The theoretical approach of everyday lived religion attempts to understand,

“what more there is to religion: whose lives, experiences and associational forms are being overlooked by the dominant gaze...and what other forms of cultural, ritual, domestic, political, and economic practice might be equally worthy of study under the rubric of religion (Woodhead 2013, p.11).

McGuire (2008, p.4) asks us to consider the aspects of religion that religious institutions themselves may not even consider important, “what might we discover if, instead of looking at affiliation or organisational participation, we focused first on individuals, the experiences they consider most important, and the concrete practices that make up their personal religious experience and expression”. As sociologists of religion, we must analyse the varying

factors that make up people’s religiosity and the different beliefs and values that make up their own experiences with religion (McGuire 2008). Drawing on Ammerman (2007, p.5), studying religion in the everyday requires us to be attentive to unconventional practices and ask questions such as, how religion operates, how participants define what is religious and spiritual, “where are traditional religions present beyond their own institutional walls, and where are new religiosities gaining a foothold?”. I use this theoretical approach to help answer questions on how young Muslims negotiate and define faith in their everyday experiences.

Spirituality can be understood as an aspect of ‘lived religion’ (see Chapter One, Section 1.2). As Dessing et al. (2013, p.3) explain, for many ‘ordinary’ Muslims, Islam is a lived religion as religious choices are constantly negotiated. The authors note how individuals can now access religious knowledge from multiple platforms (often simultaneously), through religious scholars, Sufi shaykhs and other professionals, with no specialised religious training. This enables personal choice in accessing religious knowledge.

Woodhead (2012; 2013) creates a binary between ‘strategic’ and ‘tactical’ religion. The former,

“is constantly engaged in operations to delimit and guard its sacred spaces. It has a stake in creating sacred spaces, places and objects which are clearly demarcated from profane or mundane ones: churches, mosques, sacraments, scriptures, temples, ‘holy of holies’, and so on” (Knott 2005b cited in Woodhead 2012, p.7).

On the other hand, tactical religion refers to the way religion is lived and informs everyday faith,

“...‘tactical’ religion is constantly engaged in attempts to subvert such strategies of limited and controlled sacralisation and enchantment by re-enchanting places, spaces, bodies and objects which the strategic has designated mundane and unworthy. Tactical religion ‘carries-out’ forms of the sacred and enjoys the portable: prayer mats and books, amulets and domestic shrines, headscarves and turbans, colourful pictures and bottled holy water, beards and...
fortune cards. It may locate the sacred in springs, trees, wells, gardens, roadside shrines, kitchens and living rooms, as well as within the ‘consecrated’ spaces of graveyards, temples, and tombs. Moreover, personal, ‘inner’ space may become an important part of its domain” (Woodhead 2012, p.8)

However, she does note that tactical and strategic religion can overlap, and there are no clear boundaries between the two.

In this study I endeavour to research the social spheres which shape Islam and Sufism in Britain. These forms of religion may be somewhat ‘invisible’ (Luckmann 1967), and such respondents may not be heard when research is focused on the more active and vocal Muslims, or formalised institutions10 (Jeldtoft 2011). My objective is to show the diversity in the display and practice of religion amongst young British Muslims, and how they draw upon ‘official’ forms of religion, before translating them into new contexts and expressions. Everyday lived religion will remain a key theoretical underpinning of this study. This will be elaborated in Chapter Three in my discussion on ‘lived Islam’.

2.3 Sufism in Britain

So far, I have discussed Muslim settlement in Britain and the transmission of religious learning. I have shown how this has influenced the demography and intra-religious diversity of Muslim communities. I have also explained how the development of British Muslim identities, issues of representation and the preservation of religion, have led the youth to contribute new ways of maintaining and changing religious practice. I now examine the historical context of Sufism in Britain and the transfer of Sufi traditions. As Sufism influences most Muslims worldwide (Green 2012, p.3), overlooking this would create a misleading gap in our understanding of lived Islam in Britain (Geaves 2000).

From the 1930s, Sufism in Britain was mostly practiced within specific communities and propagated by migrants from the Muslim world (Geaves et al. 2009). An early example of this are the followers of Shaykh Abdullah al-Hakimi from the Yemeni Alawi tariqa. His followers

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10 Namely strategic religion.
resided in the dockland areas of Liverpool, Cardiff, and Tyneside, and later in manufacturing cities, such as Sheffield and Birmingham (Gabriel and Geaves 2014b). Al-Hakimi’s tariqa helped form the first zawiya in Cardiff, which also had provisions for women to host their own activities and lead female-only congregations (Gilliat-Ray and Mellor 2010, p.470). South Asian migrants were also influential in bringing Sufism to Britain, with many belonging to the Barelvi tradition (Werbner 2002a). They built mosques, seminaries and places of spiritual retreat (khanqah), to host local Sufi shaykhs, saints (also referred to as pirs) and tariqas (Werbner 1990a; Werbner 2003; Werbner 2007).

At a similar period, because of the counter-culture and New Age movements in the 60s and 70s, many English converts were also experimenting with Islamic spiritual traditions, bringing the works and followers of near-Eastern (maghribi) Sufism to Britain (Geaves 2000). As people travelled between different countries, they began to translate classical, foreign texts into English and obtain copies of English-translated versions. This contributed to the rise of ‘Western Sufism’, which later inspired followers of Inayat Khan and Idries Shah. They promoted new Sufi groups through a message of a ‘universal’ kind of Sufism, which at times even crossed the boundaries of Islamic belief and practice (Sedgwick 2016) (This will be discussed further in Section 2.3.4).

Around a similar period, in the late 1960s and 70s, the teachings of Shaykh Murabit Abdul Qadir as-Sufi al-Maliki (b. 1930), a white British convert, also contributed to Western Sufism. He brought the Sufism he acquired from the Shadhiliyya-Darqawiyya-Habibiyya tariqa, and was successful in spreading its teachings to the indigenous Caucasian communities in England, and other parts of the West (Dutton 2014). His followers converted to Islam and propagated his Sufi message. This marked the start of a ‘British Sufism’. Shaykh Abdul Qadir as-Sufi’s following shows how even born Muslims can ‘rediscover’ Islam. His movement emerged during the hippie and New Age movement of the 70s, and yet his teachings referred to Islamic orthodoxy.

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11 This will be discussed further from Section 2.4.
12 Formerly known as Ian Dallas.
As predicted in an early study by Geaves (2000), today Sufism in Britain is much more diverse, and transcends particular ethnic loyalties and allegiances. This is because there has been a significant increase in communities being exposed to new Sufi teachers and associations. In particular, this started from the 1990s, when the ‘Traditional Islam’ network (TI) was promoted to defend Sufism against the growing influence of anti-Sufi groups, such as the Wahabbi and Salafi movements. It became popular for many young Muslims from different sectarian backgrounds to promote classical Sufism in a way that was intellectual and recognised as being an important part of the Islamic tradition (Hamid 2016, p.66).

Due to the Internet and globalisation, there was a link between scholars promoting Sufism from Britain, North America, South Asia, Cyprus, Yemen, Mauritania, Syria and North Africa, as well as other regions, in an articulate manner, in the English language (Hamid 2014; Gabriel and Geaves 2014b). As the focus was on scholarship and learning, it resulted in diverse communities coming together to both study and practice Sufism.

Werbner’s six-fold categorisation of Sufi orders in Britain is particularly useful to understand how contemporary Sufi expression may be departing from this typology,

“1) Only some groups attract British-born followers.
2) There is a general stress, shared by all the groups, on dhikr, or meditation. Also evident is the heterodox character of Sufism of Britain. Some groups are particularly inventive of new traditions, others veer towards a strict salafiyya (fundamentalist) pole.
3) In some groups the extent of gender equality and mixing is quite remarkable. In others, gender separation is almost total.
4) Many of the British-born or bred followers of Sufi saints in Britain are educated professionals. This highlights the fact that mystical Islam can remain attractive to educated Muslims.
5) Although the groups perceive themselves to be open to members of all faiths and nationalities, in reality groups are composed almost exclusively of men and women of Pakistani background. The dominate language spoken is Urdu, and the cultural milieu distinctively South Asian.
6) All the cult leaders engage in faith healing and amulet writing, and this is clearly a key source of income and new recruits” (Werbner 2006, p.130).
Sufism in Britain has been perceived as promoting ‘moderate Islam’. As part of the objectives of the PVE Prevent strategy, the British government has supported two prominent Sufi-based organizations: the Sufi Muslim Council (SMC) in 2006 and the British Muslim Forum (Sedgwick 2015). The SMC made efforts to form a coalition between different Sufi communities in the UK through the shared practice of venerating the Prophet Muhammad (Stjernholm 2010). However, the issues that arise from umbrella bodies like the Sufi Muslim Council is their approach to preventing radicalisation can alienate Muslims from within the community, who claim issues of (mis)representation (Gabriel and Geaves 2014b, p.202). This may explain why this organisation now seems to be non-operational.

Another example is the ‘Radical Middle Way’ that was established by Fuad Nahdi after the 7/7 attacks in the UK to support the British government’s PREVENT counter-extremism strategy.

“The Radical Middle Way (RMW) is an initiative that grew out of the Muslim magazine Q-News, which was established in the early 1990s and continued until 2006. In its heyday, Q-News had a readership of 60,000 people per month, comprising mainly second and third generation British-born Muslims as well as non-Muslim religious educators and policymakers” (Jones 2013, p.558).

The aims of the programme were to provide a “mainstream version of Islam” and offer a safe space for young people to explore their Islamic identities, by teaching traditional Islam in a way that is accessible and relevant to people’s lived experiences today. Arguably, the programme was sponsored by the state to promote a form of ‘moderate Islam’, although understandings of what this entailed changed when a new government was elected in 2010 under David Cameron, ceasing support for Radical Middle Way (Sedgwick 2020, p.130).

2.3.1 Contemporary Sufism

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13 Information taken from the reports published by the Radical Middle Way, found at https://issuu.com/radicalmiddleway/docs/timbuktu <last accessed 19/05/2020>.
“...Like the very communities where it is lived, [Sufism] is far from static. Like a fine Persian carpet that changes hues when seen from different angles, Sufism defies simple definition. As Ronald Geaves noted, the very label “Sufism” has a contest significance ranging from “Traditional Islam” to “New Age” spiritualism” (Ramsey 2012, p.285).

When Sufi traditions move across different contexts and localities, there is a struggle amongst many Sufi Muslims to pass down a tradition for subsequent generations to inherit (Green 2012). As Sufism is ‘pluralistic’ and ‘divergent’, there are often differences about how to teach Sufism, which results in varied understandings and practices amongst individuals and groups, depending on their contexts (Malik and Hinnells 2006, p.3). In her study, Hermansen characterises three groups amongst Sufis in the West: ‘hybrids’ as movements which have close ties to Islamic sources in a non-Islamic framework, ‘perennials’ who believe truth can be found in all religions, and ‘transplants’ as groups who remain the same among themselves without adapting to a new environment (Hermansen 2006, pp.28–29).

Like earlier scholars researching Sufism today, I define ‘contemporary’ as,

“ideals and practices [which] are taking a particular form in relation to the dynamics shaping global cultures today...the explicit and implicit ways that Sufism today represents past ideals and contradicts them is precisely what makes contemporary Sufism ‘contemporary’” (Sharify-Funk et al. 2017, p.246).

Whilst there is a plethora of literature surrounding tariqa-based Sufism, particularly in the British context (Geaves 2000; Werbner 2007; Dominguez-Diaz 2014), “the study of applied-rather lived-contemporary practice of Sufism has been quite limited” (Bennett and Ramsey 2012, p.1). Contemporary Sufism in non-Muslim societies is a relatively new field of research and expected to develop further. These studies convey how “Sufism did not disappear. Instead it developed and adapted to changing circumstances through the workings of individuals and groups in various societies” (Stjernholm 2014, p.197). Today, Sufism and by and large Sufi expression, takes multiple forms and is adapting to a modern mediatised, global context.
Sufi *shaykhs* use their cultural context to spread their teachings, offering people the opportunity to pledge allegiance (*bay’ah*) and participate in *dhikr* gatherings over the phone and on the Internet (Hill 2019). Contemporary Sufi expression is vibrant and dynamic, interpreted subjectively by those who adopt or take meanings from this tradition. Contemporary Sufism is a “living tradition, constantly vernacularised by its interpreters in ways that reflect the living dynamism of human reality more broadly” (Sharify-Funk et al. 2017, p.260). According to Dressler (2009, p.85) contemporary Western Sufism has some distinct characteristics, which include: 1. The unquestioned legitimacy of Sufism, 2. The possibility of advertisement and outreach activities, 3. The commodification of Sufism, 4. Sufi travelling and intra-Sufi competition, 5. The regularity of multiple affiliations and intra-Sufi networking. In this study I acknowledge this categorisation when identifying my field sites, whilst also suggesting a new typology to reflect current changes.

Numerous studies of Sufism have focused on the charisma and veneration of Sufi saints (Werbner and Basu 1998; Werbner 2003), changes in Sufism as a result of modernity (Voll 2007; Bruinessen and Howell 2007; Geaves 2014b) and changes in contemporary global, western Sufism (Malik and Hinnells 2006; Geaves et al. 2009; Hermansen 2014). However, studies of contemporary Sufism, particularly in the British context, and amongst young Muslims need renewal. It has been over six years since the most comprehensive study of Sufism in Britain, in which the editors called for more research on the indigenisation of contemporary Sufism amongst third-generation Muslims (Gabriel and Geaves 2014b). This present study aims to fill this gap.

2.3.2 Post-*tariqa* Sufism

The diversity of Sufi practice has resulted in different forms of religious expression. Research on contemporary Sufism has shown how traditional modes of *tariqa* are changing to adapt to a modern global context, with distinctive styles of Sufism emerging since the twenty-first century (Voll 2007; Bruinessen and Howell 2007; Hermansen 2009). This has given rise to multi-*tariqa* Sufi conferences, post-*tariqa* Sufi movements and different individual articulations of Sufi practice and identity (Hermansen 2009, p.39). Where early migrants often
maintained the Sufi traditions and practices of their places of origin, including their association with Sufi tariqas (Geaves 2014a), the younger generation of British-born Muslims are exploring Sufism in new and innovative ways. The existing research on contemporary Sufism has called for new studies on post-tariqa Sufism (Geaves 2014a; Sedgwick 2016). These academics have recognised changes in traditional tariqa formations, with Sufism no longer restricted to one ethnic group, and individuals searching for personal articulations of Sufi practice and identity (Geaves 2014a; Sedgwick 2016).

In a study of post-tariqa Sufism amongst South Asian communities in America, Hermansen questions whether the Barelvi movement can even be considered ‘Sufi’, as the group “stresses collective behaviour and practice rather than individual spiritual training and initiation to a tariqa” (Hermansen 2012, p.257). She notes there is a visible change in the influence of the South Asian Barelvi movement, as it is somewhat removed from the Sufism of the traditional Sufi orders. For this reason, she argues the Barelvi movement in America can be considered ‘post-tariqa’ or ‘quasi-tariqa’. In an earlier study she wrote,

“South Asians Barelvi-ism could be understood as a movement that provides a doctrinal and institutional context for popular Sufi practices. It is therefore now centred in mosques and madrasas, no longer exclusively in shrines and khanqahs. Rather than functioning as an initiatory Sufi order, adherents and sympathizers may come together in multiple contexts and may or may not be formal initiates of various Sufi orders” (Hermansen 2009, p.29).

Although the concept of post-tariqa Sufism has been explored in North America (e.g. Hermansen 2012), South Asia (e.g. Bennett and Ramsey 2012) and other regions (including research on post-modern tariqas and the ‘new Sufis’ in Mali and Morocco, also see Bruinessen and Howell 2007), no ethnographic research of this kind has been conducted in the British context. The working definition of ‘post-tariqa Sufism’ has not be sufficiently interrogated nor problematised, suggesting the need for more rigorous investigation and elaboration. To better define this term, more ethnographic research is needed in this area. Through my research I hope to fill this gap. This can be through a Sufi organisation which is not affiliated to any particular tariqa and where association to a shaykh or group is voluntary. In this thesis, I will use working definitions of post-tariqa Sufism as conceptual tools to analyse my datasets.
and generate a more comprehensive definition. This will suggest whether there are different types of tariqas which have found ways to become more effective in contemporary British society, best regarded as associational networks rather than structured organisations (Voll 2007).

2.3.3 Neo-Sufism

I now turn to explore some of the academic debates about changing forms of Sufism in the West. The concept of ‘neo-Sufism’ was first coined by Fazlur Rahman to highlight changes in the nature of Sufism during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, such as the unusual militancy of certain Sufi orders during the colonial period (Rahman 1979; Geaves 2000). However, its conceptualisation has changed over time. Neo-Sufism is sometimes used to describe the participation of Sufis in Islamic reform movements (Bruinessen and Howell 2007). It has also been used to explain how certain Sufi traditions refer to ‘traditional’ (classical/scriptural) Islamic practices. I find this particular conceptualisation problematic as it juxtaposes ‘sharia’ and ‘tariqa’. From this understanding of ‘neo-Sufism’, it appears the earlier Sufis were somewhat ignorant of scriptural religious rulings, and instead followed religious practices informed by their local culture. However, many Sufis do not see sharia and tariqa as antagonistic, but rather two necessary components (Malik and Hinnells 2006).

The various definitions of ‘neo-Sufism’ conveys the different ways in which Sufi groups have functioned (Geaves 2014b). A better definition has been generated in more recent studies. These scholars use ‘neo-Sufism’ to recognise how British Muslims engage with Sufism, by relating to their experience of Western culture (Hamid 2014). Young children of migrants to the West reassess their forefathers’ understanding of Sufism “in light of their in-between status in Western society” (Geaves 2014b, p.47).

2.3.4 Universal Sufism

14 In their work, these authors dedicate two paragraphs tracing some of the changes in the use of the term ‘neo-Sufism’ over time. However, they have not included Hamid or Geaves’ use of the term.
The concept of ‘universal Sufism’ is frequently used in research about forms of Sufism that have been prevalent in the West. This is outlined in the work of Geaves (2000) who describes how,

“...others have tried to portray the Sufi message without any attempt to locate the practices in the Muslim world. They have extracted or emphasised the mystical element in Sufism whilst simultaneously removing the Muslim content which has usually been perceived as a cultural historic accretion to a universal and eternal message concerning the human relationship with the Divine” (Geaves 2000, p.161).

Therefore, not all Sufis feel they needed to be confined to the institutional discipline of a tariqa, as they have a universal outlook towards other traditions. However, Geaves (2000, pp.161-163) also notes how the vast majority of practising Sufis are apprehensive about the concept of Universal Sufism, as they primarily see themselves as devout Muslims. Their claim is those who have left Islam or who fail to observe key religious practices cannot be considered as genuine practitioners of Sufism.

In the literature, I have found that Universal Sufism is most commonly associated with the Western Sufism of Idries Shah and Inayat Khan (Khan 1963; Shah 1968; Geaves et al. 2009). Idries Shah had no strong connection to organised Sufism and insisted that Sufism needed to be adapted to modern conditions, specifically a Western audience (Zebiri 2012). However, although he did not have a shaykh himself, he recommended those who desired to have a spiritual teacher to seek one out (Geaves 2000). Similarly, Inayat Khan declared that his religious message could only be furthered if he universalised his Sufi teachings (Sedgwick 2016). This shows how these key thinkers, associated with Universal Western Sufism, endorsed perennialism to promote Islam in the West.

Non-affiliated Sufism may be considered either post-tariqa or Universal Sufism. It conveys the way in which religious people engage with television and Internet content as a source of religious guidance and spiritual teaching, without necessarily observing the traditions of a particular group or sect (Cheruvallil-Contractor 2014; Jackson 2014). Such media sources can

15 Such as, the five pillars of Islam.
increase diversity within the Sufi ‘field’ (Cheruvallil-Contractor 2014, p.161). Therefore, as previous scholars have suggested, this poses the question as to how much should one adhere to Islamic tenets to qualify as a ‘Sufi’, and ‘how can the label ‘Sufism’ be rightly applied to a group?’ (Jackson 2014, p.53). This study will consider these debates, as this discussion has been deficient in the existing literature.

2.3.5 Transnational Sufi practices: Naat Khwaani

Transnational Sufism has helped maintain and revitalise Sufi traditions and practices (Nielsen et al. 2006; Malik and Hinnells 2006; Geaves et al. 2009). One example is the recitation of Islamic devotional poetry in praise of the Prophet Muhammad (naat). As ‘Islamic music’ can be considered a form of para-liturgical worship (Morris 2017b), the recitation of naats (naat khwaani) is an oral and aural form of religious and spiritual practice.

“Naat is a devotional performance genre frequently encountered in South Asian Muslim settings, most commonly in Urdu. In consist of recitations of poems in praise of the prophet Muhammed and also of other Islamic authorities such as the prominent Sufi teacher Mu’inddin Chishti. Nevertheless, naat is most strongly associated with the intense devotion to and veneration of the proper which for many Muslims in south Asia and its diasporas, are key to proper Islamic conduct. The performance of these devotional poems and hymns addressed to the prophet enacts a special relationship between Muslims and the prophet and is tied to a notion of the prophet having a continual spiritual presence of his own. In more recent times, the performance of naat has been associated with the South Asian Islamic traditions that place particular emphasis on devotion to the Prophet, foremost among them the Ahl-e-Sunnah” (Eisenlohr 2009, p.101).

Although this is a traditional South Asian practice, it is distinctive in the British context as young Muslims have now made this a popular practice on social media. Although the field of Islamic music has been researched (Qureshi 1986; Hyder and Petievich 2009; Morris 2017b), the acoustic field of naat recitation has received little attention.
Despite its popularity amongst Barelvi and Deobandi communities, to date there has been no study of youth naat khwaani in Britain. In his work on contemporary Islamic music in Britain, Morris (2017) explains the practice of British youth reciting naats and Islamic songs (nasheeds) in religious gatherings (mehfils). However, his research does not cover any qualitative research on these youth naat reciters (naat khwaans). In later research, he expresses the need for more studies on young British naat khwaani and the intersection between cultural practices and social and religious change (Morris 2019; Morris and Rooij 2019). Through my research I fill this gap. In particular, I discover how young British-Pakistani naat khwaans are using new methods to disseminate a religious and spiritual message, which is permeated by South Asian cultural traditions, yet influenced by the religious teachings of Barelvi ulama.

Eisenlohr’s (2009) ethnomusicological study is amongst the few pieces of research that has considered the role of naat recitation as a devotional practice amongst Muslims living in South Asia and Mauritius. In his study, he mostly relies on data gathered from listening to naats in religious gatherings and interactions between him and naat reciters in Mauritius. He also translates naats he heard at the gatherings and from naat CDs. However, Eisenlohr (2009), does not provide an account of the methods and methodology behind his data gathering. This gives no indication of his sample size, nor the duration of his ethnography or the extent of his online research. Moreover, although he documented how Deobandi’s critiqued naat khwaani, he did not mention that this practice of recitation is also common within the Deobandi tradition. He did note how naats are now available through transnational contexts, as they can be downloaded from the Internet, but due to the date of the study, he could not consider the role of social media.

Naat khwaani on social media appears to have contributed to transnational Sufi practice and has made prevalent the imitation and circulation of this tradition in new contexts. This has been considered by Rosowsky (2010; 2017; 2018), who also observes the role of multilingualism and memorisation amongst young performers. Social media has promoted the practice of naat khwaani, and has facilitated in disseminating a religious and spiritual message, once confined to students of poets and followers of saints and tariqas, to a larger, global audience, outside of the Indo-Pak Barelvi community. This has been useful in
reconstructing popular Islam amongst urban British communities. However, the impact of the role of social media in preserving this practice to help maintain Sufi traditions has been limited. My research will address this gap. Online video and audio recordings of naats are easily accessible to British Muslim youth, and help in building Sufi networks across national and transnational borders. The role of ‘cyber Sufism’ and how this study will address this lacuna will be discussed later on in this chapter.

2.4 Religion and Spirituality in Britain

It is important to consider the social environment in which Sufism in Britain is embedded and manifests; it does not occur in a cultural or social ‘vacuum’. To that end, I discuss changes in religion and spirituality over the last fifty years, starting from the 1960s when there was an increased interest in Eastern philosophy and new forms of spirituality amongst indigenous communities in Britain (Campbell 1999). This was enhanced through globalisation, making it easier to travel and learn from diverse communities. In the UK, the New Age and new religious movements were formed during an ongoing awareness of new cultures and traditions. This created a newfound interest in holistic treatments, alternative medicine and spiritual healing (Beckford 1985).

In a study by Possamai (2016), he found that new religious movements still exist, but they are not as popular as they were in the 60s and 70s. It was during this period, religious experimentation flourished. Many people wanted to move away from authoritative and institutional religion to seek spirituality for and by themselves. In an additional study, Sutcliffe (2003) notes how prior to the 1970s, those involved with alternative spiritualties were ‘serial’ seekers, ascetics and otherworldly. They would pursue and change religious or spiritual affiliations more than once, over the course of their lifetime. However, after the 1970s, and during the New Age, these groups became countercultural and adventurous. Followers were ‘multiple seeking’, gathering various spiritual resources simultaneously, which were decontextualized and reconstructed in new settings (Sutcliffe 2003, p.204).
As religious experimentation increased, new counterculture movements were formed. Research conveys how these developments produced the beginnings of a “holistic milieu”, which has gradually increased over time (Heelas et al. 2005; Heelas 2006). This is defined as:

“Associational activities, of a group or one-to-one variety, run by mind-body-spirit practitioners, which take place within their own self-contained contexts rather than within and with reference to broader institutional contexts like schools or businesses” (Heelas 2006, p.47).

As part of this wider social change in the 60s and 70s, new subcultures also emerged, such as the counterculture Hippie movement. The Hippies would choose from different Eastern philosophies and spiritual movements, and use travel, music, pop art and non-Western style clothing to promote their values (Miller 1991). Other alternative subcultures were also formed, such as the punk movement. This included Muslim punk bands in Britain, such as Alien Kulture (1979). Although some of the members of this punk band were of Muslim descent, their subculture primarily emerged to promote Asian culture. Additionally, in the 1990s, Nation Records produced a Muslim punk act, ‘Fun-Da-Mental’16. Their music conveyed political messages about the struggles of ethnic minorities, and managing their British Islamic identity in a climate of Islamophobia (Mitchell 2001).

Grace Davie’s (1994) work suggests some of the effects of the exposure to other religious and spiritual movements on indigenous communities in Britain. Her findings show that between the 1960s and 1990s, (Christian) religious belief remained, although religious practice and attendance to religious services declined. Belief in God and an accepting attitude towards the churches widely persisted but this was being less influenced by orthodox Christian teachings. Additionally, although there was a broad tolerance of religious diversity in a pluralist society, it was the Rushdie affair which signified how some religions were easier to accommodate than others. Furthermore, whilst there was an increased awareness of religions in foreign or exotic lands, there were ethnically homogenous (rural) swathes of Britain where religious pluralism was largely unknown.

16 After 9/11 they became more well-known for their political sensibilities.
Although Islam is comprised of religion (teachings, rituals and formal institutions) and spirituality (lived religion or embodied faith), there is relatively limited literature about the way in which Muslims in Britain engage in religious and/or spiritual experimentation. My work therefore fills an interesting gap, by examining intra-religious experimentation. By this, I am referring to moving between alternative forms of (Islamic) religious and spiritual forms. This movement may be between different types of groups, denominations, Sufi orders, teachers, and cultural and mediatised sources. This is much like the ‘multiple seeking’ Sutcliffe (2003) refers to in his study on spirituality in Glastonbury. From the gaps in the literature, my study will need to address whether young British Muslims, exposed to this diversity (that is augmented by new media), are forming their own (Sufi) trends? In addition to this, we can legitimately question how and to what extent the establishment of new Sufi movements is consonant with Britain’s social and religious environment.

2.4.1 Religion in the Census

In the 1990s, the British Government began to take an interest in other religions, as society became more multicultural and pluralistic. As mentioned earlier, this was greatly sparked by Muslim attitudes to the Rushdie affair (1989-89) and the First Gulf War (1990). In 2001, the government responded to the concern of religious minorities, particularly the Muslims, who campaigned for the Census to include a question on religion. Muslim organisations, like the MCB argued that they had distinctive social policy needs that could be better understood via the collection of Census data. This was the first Census to include a voluntary question on religious identity since 1851 (Davie 2015).

To further understand religion in the Census, I have relied on the official quantitative data and qualitative reports from the Office for National Statistics. I have also used the research findings from the Westminster faith debate (2012) on the main trends in religion and values in Britain, headed by senior academics associated with the ‘Religion and Society

17 Sources such as books, poetry, media, the Internet and social media.
In the second edition of her book, on religion in Britain, Davie’s (2015) work is also helpful in understanding facts and figures behind the questions on religious trends. Her work analyses findings drawn from the 2001 and 2011 census. Due to limited space, I will summarise some of the key findings below.

The 2001 Census in England and Wales showed 3 per cent (1.54 million) of the population were Muslim. In 2011, this figure rose to 4.8 per cent (2.7 million). Muslim communities are diverse in terms of ethnicity, language, race, and nationality. The Census indicated that 47 per cent of Muslims are UK-born. They are the largest ‘minority religious group’ (Davie 2015). The data also shows Britain is becoming less religious, with a decline in numbers of those who affiliate with a religion or attend religious services. Based on research in 2010, 79 per cent of the British public described themselves as having been brought up in a particular religion, however 50 per cent do not current affiliate with a religion (Davie 2015). This was coined as ‘the nones’ by Linda Woodhead, who claims that this figure on the census is likely to be much higher due to various factors,

“One reason is the way in which the religion question is posed in the Census for England and Wales, not as ‘do you have a religion?’ followed by a list of options, but the more leading ‘what is your religion?’, coming immediately after questions about ethnicity. Another reason is that census forms are completed by a head of household on behalf of others, but older people in Britain today are much more likely than younger ones to say they have a religion, so heads of household may be inaccurately imputing their own identity to children” (Woodhead 2016, p.246).

Older, more religious generations are being replaced by younger, less religious ones. Figures have shown 65 per cent of 18–24 year olds do not affiliate to a religion, compared with 55% of the same age group (18–27) in 1983 (NatCen Social Research 2014).

The Census data on religion in Britain shows an overall decline in religious affiliation. To coin the phrase associated with Grace Davie, many people were ‘believing without belonging’, while simultaneously exploring spirituality rather than organised religion. This particularly began during the rise of the New Age movement, as some people began experimenting with different religions via ‘spiritual shopping’, engaging in ‘pick and mix religion’, and following mystical traditions that allowed them to have a direct encounter with the Divine (Heelas et al. 2005; Hervieu-Léger 2006; Motak 2014). This allowed religious experience to become ‘individualistic’, driven by personal choice (Motak 2014). This caused many people to turn to ‘quick spiritual fixes’ and to choose those elements of religion which would best suit their cultural and moral values (Turner 2011).

As previously mentioned, many of these findings relate to Davie’s (1994; 2015) research on ‘believing without belonging’, a phrase she coined to account for religious changes between the 1960s and the 1990s. Although religious practice was in decline, individuals retained religious belief (Davie 1994). However, she notes how ‘believing’ and ‘belonging’ should not be ‘considered too rigidly’, and the tighter our definitions are of the two, ‘the smaller the numbers involved’ (Davie 1994, p.93; Davie 2015, p.74). However, in a later study Davie’s concept of ‘believing without belonging’ was critiqued (Voas and Crockett 2005).

Voas and Crockett (2005) used data from the British Household Panel Survey and the British Social Attitudes Survey to argue that there is a generational decline in religious belief, as well as religious practice. Rodney Stark however argues the concept of ‘unchurched religion’ to help explain how low levels of religious attendance and knowledge does not account for people being irreligious (Stark 2015). Unchurched religion,

“...typically lacks a congregational life, usually existing as relatively free-floating culture based on loose networks of like-minded individuals who, if they do gather regularly, do not acknowledge a specific religious creed, although they may tend to share a common religious outlook. Unchurched religions may or may not coalesce around leaders” (Stark et al. 2005, p.8).

21 This was based on research on Christianity. Religious practice also refers to Church attendance.
In the revised version of this theory, Davie (2015) claims that people are shifting away from anything that can be considered ‘orthodox’, as the secular impinges on the religious. As this is mostly based on research in relation to Christianity I would like to see whether Davie’s theory can be applied to the Sufi experiences amongst British Muslims. Similarly, DeHanas’ conceptualisation of ‘elastic orthodoxy’ implies that young Muslims “accept the local social consensus on what it is to be a Muslim (orthodoxy), and then work tactically within this framework, stretching it to apply to new contexts and situations (elastic)” (DeHanas 2013, p.82). Through this Islam is continually recontextualised according to different circumstances and these conditions help shape the construction of young Muslims’ identities (DeHanas 2013). Are young Muslims trying to escape, what can be considered, ‘orthodoxy’, or are they acquiring spiritual direction from traditional sources and translating this in new ways? My work provides an opportunity to ask such questions, and provide some answers.

2.4.2 Secularisation and religious individualism

British Muslims are situated in the socio-religious context of religious change in Britain and the extensive debates about the decline in religious affiliation (secularisation). In a study by Voas (2009), he evaluates the first wave of the European Social Survey (ESS). Although his analysis is predominantly based on those identifying with the Christian faith, his study informs wider changes about religion in Europe. The survey data was gathered through interviews and self-completion questionnaires. In his analysis, Voas (2009) found that although there was no single pattern of secularisation, there was a decline in religion in Europe, which was particularly prominent from the early to the late twentieth century.

According to some researchers, secularisation was an inevitable consequence of the modernisation of society (Bruce 2006; Wilke 2013). Religion became more marginalised and society became increasingly secular because of individualism, and the growing diversity in beliefs, interpretation and practice. This has led some theorists to claim secularisation is not a loss of religious values, but rather a decline in institutional religion (Luckmann 1967; Beck 2010). Religion became more privatised (‘invisible’) and individualised, than institutionalised.
For Luckmann (1967), religion has now entered secular sectors of society, whereas previously, society had little to do with religion, but provided meaning and offered rituals.

However, in a more up-to-date study by Knoblauch (2008), it is argued that while religion may have become privatised, it is now hyper-visible rather than invisible. This is because contemporary society can be regarded as an ‘information society’. The Internet and new media allow religion to shift from private domains to the public, and vice versa. One feature of the individualisation of religion is religious/spiritual experimentation. The New Age is only one element of this (Sutcliffe and Bowman 2000). Research has shown how contemporary spirituality is the formation of highly personalised spiritual packages, based on personal preference, which simultaneously draw on multiple styles and traditions (Sutcliffe and Bowman 2000; Houtman and Aupers 2010).

For some Muslims, their contemporary religious experience transcends “the deterministic binaries of traditional religious and modern secular identities” (Echchaibi 2012, p.38). As Gilliat-Ray (2012) notes, for many British Muslims, their religious practices cross multiple aspects of daily life and activities. However, like other faith communities, they too share an awareness of the extent to which their religious worldviews can be undermined, because of excessive consumerism and individualism. In addition to this, in a popular text, Janmohamed (2016) has written about young Muslim millennials (Generation M). She notes how the rise of individualism has previously been an explanation for religious decline, with some people wanting to move away from following rules. However, Generation M’s religious experience is unique as they are driven by individualism and independence which has pushed some of them to revive their faith. Through my research, I want to ask what individualised religion and experimentation means for young British Muslims. Could this include having access to multiple platforms (such as, the Internet and social media), and selectively deciding which of these can cater for their individual religious and spiritual needs?

In Wilke’s (2013) study, she analyses data gathered from Muslims living in Germany from the Religion Monitor 2008 and 2013 survey. Through her research, she suggests that although the visible expressions of Islam hide trends in individualisation, it still exists amongst the great majority of Muslims. She further notes, Islam can be considered individualised due the
personal responsibility of one’s faith. However, there remains a collective emphasis, through the organisation of Sufi orders and the role of the shaykh in providing spiritual guidance. One limitation of this claim is that it does not consider Sufis outside of tariqa, nor those seeking spiritual direction from multiple shuyookh. Through my research I want to assess whether there is still a collective emphasis within Sufism today. Or, have changes in society (including the Internet and new media), led to Sufi expression becoming more individualised?

2.5 Religion in consumer society and the Internet

Having examined briefly the religious context of the UK over the last fifty years, I now consider the wider social context which informs contemporary religious experience. Some of the main findings from the Westminster Faith Debates, research conducted under the auspices of the Religion and Society Programme (2008-2012), revealed that in modern societies the Internet and new media can create a religious ‘market’, providing a wide range of opportunities for religious ‘producers’ and ‘products’. Religion in the market brands itself, takes payment for providing services and attracts different religious consumers, which enables a ‘spiritual marketplace’ (Aupers and Houtman 2006). Consumers can alternate between different religious prospects, to find that which caters to their needs. As the emphasis is on individual choice, the ways in which an individual can be considered religious has changed, as people are now more open to supporting idiosyncratic identities.

2.5.1 The Rational Choice theory and the market-model of religion

The market-model of religion and rational theories were developed to provide an explanation for religious choices (Stark and Bainbridge 1987; Finke and Stark 1998; Spickard 1998). There are four key figures in the early development of the rational choice theory: Rodney Stark, William Sims Bainbridge, Roger Finke and Laurence Iannaccone. Using an economic model, rational choice theorists argue religious organisations are like ‘firms’ who compete for

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23 Ibid.
adherents, as they would do in a marketplace (Iannaccone 1992; Finke and Iannaccone 1993). In the face of secularisation, the producers are in a state of competition and have to incentivise religion for the consumers who look to religion to meet their needs (Finke and Stark 1992; Finke 1997; Finke and Stark 1998).

“The more pluralistic a religious economy is, the higher the level of religious mobilization. To the extent that there are many religious firms competing against each other, they will tend to specialize and cater to the particular needs of some segments of religious consumers. This specialization and catering in turn increase the number of religious consumers actively engaged in the religious economy” (Hechte and Kanazawa 1997, p.198).

Religious consumers make ‘rational choices’ in this ‘religious market’ – “religious people are not looney or deluded; they use the same reasoning processes as everyone else to gain the goods they seek” (Spickard 1998, p.100). Within these unregulated markets, the churches in particular (like other voluntary organisations), must keep their adherents committed to sustain themselves (Finke et al. 1996). In addition to this, religious pluralism offers consumers more choice, and thus more options are available to meet their demands and cater to their individual preferences (Finke et al. 1996, p.205). In this context, the consumers evaluate the costs and benefits to see which actions benefit them the most – what provides them most value (Iannaccone 1992).

“An unregulated religious market leads to organisational pluralism, pluralism to competition, competition to specialisation of product and aggressive recruitment, specialisation and recruitment to higher demand, and higher demand to greater participation” (Yamane 1998, p.154).

As consumers look for the benefits of upholding religious commitment, critics of this theory argue that, “it construes religious commitment exclusively as a self-interested action” (Jerolmack and Porpora 2004, p.145) and a selfish pursuit. This emphasises egoism, which limits rational choice theorists’ sociological basis, and should therefore should be better understood as a psychological or philosophical theory. Another critique is that religious pluralism may not always lead to an increase in people’s personal levels of religiosity and
there may be an increase in people who are indifferent to religion (Müller 2016, p.244). The suppliers of religion may become so competitive that they overemphasise their religious identity to place themselves in opposition to other religious groups (Müller 2016).

However, rational choice theorists maintain that producers and consumers of religion work together – the ‘seller’ has to retain the interest of the ‘buyer’. Thus, the consumer’s preference in the religious commodities that appeal to them shape the processes of production, and this what makes them profitable and attractive (Iannaccone 1997, p.27). This is conceptualised as ‘supply and demand’ (Finke and Iannaccone 1993; Finke 1997).

“On a competitive religious market there is a higher probability that everyone finds a faith that fits his beliefs which increases the demand for religious goods. Since a single church cannot earn positive profits the supply of religious goods will also be higher. Hence, on a competitive market, i.e. with greater religious diversity, the overall level of religiosity should increase” (Iannaccone 1991 cited in Opfinger 2011, p.2).

Producers and consumers of religion will also look to wider religious capital to see what services are both time and cost efficient in providing consumers more value. This is because consumers want a return on their investment and they want to avoid risk and uncertain benefits in exchange for religious goods and experiences that determine effectiveness. The suppliers can offer ‘compensators’, that is a distant rewards, may be even in another life, as an alternative to immediate benefits when they cannot be provided (Stark 1997, p.7). The consumers may act as ‘free-riders’ in attending multiple religious firms, particularly in large congregations where they do not need to uphold commitment, in order to diversify their (religious) portfolios (Iannaccone 1997). This economic model of religion has also informed debates about the role of secularisation,

“The economic theory of religion was a challenge to the theory of secularization. In fact, it was already clear in the 1990s that scholars of religion were fighting a battle over two opposing theoretical models of how to understand religion in the modern world. Proponents of the economic theory believe that demand for religion is constant over time, while proponents of
secularization theory believe that religious demand was high in the past and has declined steadily over the past three centuries” (Brekke 2016, p.29).

As Sufism is embedded within a consumer society, rational choice theory becomes a useful explanatory device for considering the way in which contemporary Sufism is both produced and consumed.

“Religious markets in Islamic societies consisted of the supply of religious goods offered by the Sufi shaykhs and their networks of followers...they offered a type of religious identity that was achieved rather than ascribed by birth...For common people, the religious goods offered by Sufi brotherhood, such as rituals, healings and welfare services were often very important” (Brekke 2016, p.84).

Rational choice theory helps explain economic approaches to religion and how entrepreneurship may impact religious behaviours. It considers how religious choice leads to individualism. When drawing on the rational choice theory in this study, I also consider these secondary factors when examining new Sufi actors and authorities (see McBride 2016).

2.5.2 Religion in a consumer society

Contemporary society is commonly referred as ‘consumer society’. Brands and organisations can help form social networks and provide identity and belonging (Gauthier et al. 2013). As a result, religion is becoming a consumer choice in a global market (Speck 2013). Religion must “compete with other cultural products, and is thereby forced to become more convenient, customer-oriented, relevant to everyday life, and entertaining” (Gauthier et al. 2013, p.17). An important feature of contemporary religiosity is bricolage, where religion is constructed through a diverse range of things, for oneself, as an individual choice (Beck 2010). Bricolage stems from the belief that religious institutions “lose their hold on individual believers” and describes how people can explore the internal aspects of their own religion whilst combining religious and secular perspectives to create a personal worldview (Altglas 2014b, pp.5–6 cited in Illman 2018, p.6).
“[Through] the global marketplace, the individual is *empowered* to create his or her *unique strategy for living in the modern world*—at least according to an implicit code of consumption which suggests that buying into this bricolage is the first step toward responsibility” (Lau 2000, p.13 cited in Altglas 2014b, italics original).

This allows individuals to ‘shop’ and choose from those elements of religion which best meet their personal religious and spiritual needs. However, this has not yet been considered in relation to contemporary Sufism.

Scholars of contemporary religion since the New Age movement have explored the way in which spirituality still ‘sells’ (Woodhead et al. 2002; Heelas et al. 2005; Heelas 2006). Over recent years this has been recognised in relation to Sufism. Dressler (2009) has noted of the commodification of Sufism, such as, the selling of Sufi music and Sufi/Muslim utensils, including Muslim clothing, perfume and incense. He also writes of how in the West, Sufi poetry, music and practice are advertised and sold to promote a globalised form of mysticism. This includes the poetry of Jalaluddin Rumi (bestseller in the U.S), popular Sufi music (most prominently *qawwali* singers like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan), and popular books on Sufi mysticism (such as the works of Idries Shah) (Sedgwick 2008, pp.188–191).

Dressler’s (2009) study indicates how one can concurrently be both a producer and consumer of Sufism. Moreover, religious and spiritual paraphernalia can be used as part of a fashion trend and as an expression of identity. For example, rosary beads (*tasbih*), which are used by Muslims/Sufis for *dhikr*, can also be used as a trendy fashion statement, as neck chains or bracelets (see Rinallo et al. 2013). More research is needed on the commodification of Sufism and its relationship to Islamic spirituality (Milani and Possamai 2015).

2.5.3 Muslim cultural production

More recent academic research has shown the intersections between youth, religion, consumption, popular culture and identity how young Muslims make Islam ‘chic’, modern and fashionable, as participants in an urban consumer culture (Ali and Hartmann 2015; Golnaraghi and Daghar 2017; Williams and Kamaludeen 2017). As the youth grow up in commodified
societies they shape a new contemporary Islam. They negotiate the secular and religious, and develop hybridised identities (Williams and Kamaludeen 2017).

Globalisation and media production are also key factors in contemporary religious experience. The media is now a rich resource for the construction of British Muslim identities. It provides new information, both on and available to British Muslims, and a platform on which they can communicate amongst themselves and to wider society (Ahmed 2003). Academic research on ethnomusicology has shown how musicians construct a ‘modern’ Muslim identity, in order to replace cultural and ethnic understandings of Islam (old religion), with a diffuse, “socially and religiously reflective form of Islam (new religion)” (Echchaibi 2012; Morris 2016, p.15; Morris 2017b). This is particularly through nasheed and Islamic hip-hop artists. Many Muslims see hip-hop and centuries old Islamic poetry as analogous (Khabeer 2007). Islamic musicians can adopt the role of cultural educators. It gives non-Muslims a valuable insight into Islam and what is means to be a Muslim, and by evoking a religious message, it can bring the listener and reciter closer to God (Miyakawa 2005a; Dervla and Hussain 2011).

Sufi music in the West, like qawwali or naats, can retain an element of cultural practice, such as language and recitation style. What makes this type of music distinctive, is that it upholds a religious function, such as arousing mystical love, alongside the autonomy to control the influence of performances in different contexts (Qureshi 1986; Qureshi 1993). Much of the research on Islamic music has relied on qualitative data gathering, through observations and interviews. This is to understand what music means to the musicians and how these meanings are conveyed through religious music.

The existing literature suggests Islamic music in the West transmits religious and spiritual teachings, whilst retaining cultural imprints. The amalgamation of different religious, cultural and ethnic practices conveys alternate Muslim identities. The hybrid identities and cultural performances by reciters has contributed towards the production of new Muslim identities in Britain. As I have previously noted, naat khwaani on social media has become a popular practice amongst the British Muslim youth, and yet it has received virtually no academic attention to date. My work therefore fills a significant gap.
2.5.4. Islam on the Internet and social media

Young British Muslim identities are constantly evolving as their lifestyle choices are shaped by wider global contexts (Hamid 2017b). Janmohamed (2016) identifies significant changes which have provided young Muslims a global space to assert their identity. Some of these include the growing middle class and the role of the Internet and social media. Technology has allowed Muslims in Britain to have a greater access to knowledge, beyond their localities. Mobile phones and tablets can be turned into TV screens and religious textbooks. Those seeking religious education or even spiritual guidance can turn to internationally available technological platforms, like the Internet.

“There’s no online world plays a pivotal role in shaping identity, relationships and connectivity, but Islam is a religion of real places, spoken words and real actions: the mosque, the family, the community, rituals and sermons are all testament to this. The digital world only complements, and does not replace them” (Janmohamed 2016, p.315).

Islamic teaching is becoming widely accessible, through the Internet, v/blogs, online livestreaming, radio and TV channels (e.g. Ummah Channel) and the means by which this knowledge is accessed is highly personalised and individualised (such as, mobile phones and social media accounts) (Gilliat-Ray 2012). “Television, film, music, internet, and other media complexify the opportunities, means, and outcomes of youths’ cultural practices” (Williams and Kamaludeen 2017, p.2). This has created a greater awareness of the diversity within Muslim communities and provides instant access to various fields of knowledge. As young British Muslims seek greater individualisation and diversification of the religious field, the option of personal choice gives them an avant-garde approach to religious practice (Hamid 2016). The Internet can provide a wide range of options for them to choose their own mode of religious learning and facilitate translocal and transnational networks (Voll 2007).

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24 Connect and influencing multiple localities and people at the same time.
The concept of ‘digital religion’ refers to both the articulation of religion and how digital media shapes lived religious practice (Campbell 2005; Campbell 2010; Campbell 2013). Whilst religious activity online can sometimes be an extension of the offline, it provides new ways of community, belonging and shared identity (Hutchings 2011; Hutchings 2013; Hutchings 2017). Sociologists of religion differentiate between ‘religion online’ and ‘online religion’, the former provides information about religion, whereas the latter is based on participation and interaction in religious practices (Helland 2005; Dawson and Cowan 2013).

Muslims who consume faith, express and participate in religious discourse online have been labelled ‘iMuslims’ (Bunt 2009, p.280). Research on Islam and Muslims on the Internet has analysed how Muslims use computer-mediated communication and digital platforms to bind previously dispersed communities and form new ways of identifying with Islam (Bunt 2000; Bunt 2003; Weintraub 2011). Bunt’s prominent studies on cyber Islamic environments have provided insights about online Islamic identities amongst young Muslims, changes in religious authority, and religion on new social networks (Bunt 2000; Bunt 2009; Bunt 2018). He acutely notes how the Internet provides a democratisation of religious leadership, which allows people to follow alternative authorities. In a small way, this study elaborates on Bunt’s work by considering Sufism online. Whilst he has included studies about online tariqa-based groups, such as the Tidjani, Qadiri and Naqshbandi-Haqqani movements (Bunt 2018), research on Sufi expression outside of Sufi orders has been limited.

Piraino’s (2016) study of the Alawiya, Budshishiyya, Jerrahiyya-Khalwatiyya and Naqshbandi-Haqqani’s online, via website and Facebook data also documents the roles of rituals and religious experiences of tariqa Sufism online. In particular, he distinguishes between ‘Sufism online’ and ‘online Sufism’. The former is bound with membership and initiation to promote the tariqa and reaffirm religious beliefs; the latter is more fluid in association and allows expressions of lived religion.

“Sufism online allows us to comprehend that ‘the medium is the message’, which reshapes the organisational forms, allowing the promotion of another Islam and the creation of a more transnational Sufism…the internet seems to sustain communities, insofar as there is no difference between the virtual and the real” (Piraino 2016, p.104, rephrased).
He also draws upon the works of the rational choice theorists to show how “Naqshbandi Sufism is no longer a tariqa, but an ‘audience’ or ‘client cult’” (Stark and Bainbridge 1979; Piraino 2016, p.105).

One of the most recent comprehensive cyber Sufi studies in America was completed by Rozehnal (2019), which also focused on Sufi communities within Sufi orders, through the Inayati movement. It also provides vignettes of the Jerrahi order, the Naqshbandi-Haqqani’s and Mevlevi Sufism via the Threshold Society. His study shows both digital experimentation through the integration of video, social media posts and live-stream events, alongside an “underlying anxiety and pervasive ambivalence in Sufi attitudes towards digital media” (Rozehnal 2019, p.181). Whilst this provides a systematic overview of contemporary Sufism online, including spiritual pedagogy and public outreach, it excludes Sufi manifestations outside of tariqa formations.

In the British context, the only research of Sufi expression amongst young Muslims online has been through Cheruvallil-Contractor’s study (2014) of online forums. She shares how on online forums young Muslims can ask questions about religion that may be difficult to ask in person.

“Deep spiritual understandings and ontological discussions seamlessly co-exist with everyday chit-chat...These young people were Sufis without knowing or practicing the deep reflective practices that are characteristic of Sufism (Cheruvallil-Contractor 2014, pp.163, 171).

However, as society and technology become more instantaneous, forums have now become an outdated communication platform. Her study can be updated to include the role of social media and provides a springboard to examine the new ways in which young Muslims identify as spiritual or Sufi.

Research on cyber Sufism is constantly emerging, with academics calling for more research in this field (Taher 2006; Cheruvallil-Contractor 2014; Rozehnal 2019). Through my study I hope to fill this gap. My study will be distinctive, by conducting research through those
communication platforms which have replaced online forums, such as social media. I will focus on the use of YouTube and Facebook, as two of the most popular forms of social networking (Svensson 2014; Storer-Church 2017). Respondents can use these apps for discussions and they help cultivate a sense of community and belonging (Storer-Church 2017). As social media is ubiquitous, it constantly shapes young British Muslims’ identities, as they engage in debates and negotiate forms of Islamic expression through alternative religious authorities (Bunt 2009; Bunt 2018).

2.6 Conclusion: Research questions

This chapter has introduced the terrain of this project, locating the historical context of Islam and Sufism in Britain. My critical review has shown that the interaction between transnational Sufism and the social environment in Britain has led to new forms of Sufi manifestations that have largely escaped academic attention. So far, I have identified several key issues that are relatively unexplored. These themes include post-tariqa Sufism, youth naat khwaani, Sufi expression on social media outside of tariqa-based movements, and the sociological and consumer landscape that impacts religious individualism, bricolage and commercialisation. This study endeavours to address these debates via three research questions:

1. **What are the current forms of Sufi expression amongst young British Muslims?**

2. **What is the role of social media in contemporary religious expression?**

3. **What does the new Sufi phenomenon tell us about religious engagement amongst young British Muslims?**

In order to answer these questions, this thesis will include a comparative study of different Sufi trends amongst young Muslims, in offline and online spaces. I will use the exploratory definition of post-tariqa Sufism as conceptual tool to choose and analyse my field sites and generate a complete definition of this term. My theoretical contribution will be in the multidisciplinary fields of British Muslim Studies, Sufi Studies, cyber religion and the sociology of religion, by drawing on the market-model of religion and theories on everyday lived
religion. In the following chapter, I will outline the epistemological and theoretical underpinnings of this project. I will also discuss the methodologies I used to collect and analyse my datasets.
Chapter Three – Methodology and Methods

3.0 Introduction

In Chapter Two, I outlined the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used to answer my research questions. These rest on theories about everyday ‘lived religion’ and rational choice theory. I have indicated where there are significant gaps in relation to research about Sufism in Britain; in particular, there has been a lack of empirical research on the contemporary British Sufi landscape in relation to post-*tariqa* Sufi expressions. This chapter builds on my literature review and makes the case for the theoretical and methodological grounding for this study.

When there has been little research on a subject, and in order to explore new concepts, qualitative methods are necessary, as researchers may be unaware of the most important features to examine (Creswell 2014). A qualitative approach allows participants the opportunity to express their personal religious and spiritual involvements, in their own context. This enables researchers to explore how individuals experience religion and spirituality, and, in the case of this project, examine the kinds of Islam/Sufism that different Muslims engage with (Bectovic 2011). A quantitative methodology would not be appropriate for this particular study. It does not seek to be replicated, nor does it claim to be representative of all Muslim communities or expressions of Sufism. Rather, the objective is to shed light on some of the everyday, lived experiences of Sufism amongst young British Muslims, who appear to be reclaiming Sufi traditions in new ways (see Chapter Two). As religion is multifaceted, ethnographic and netnographic methods help capture the complexities of the ways in which young Muslims negotiate and reconstruct their religious practices.

In this chapter, I begin by detailing my epistemological and theoretical approach, which informs my methodological practice. I position this study under the umbrella of social constructionism when researching everyday lived Islam. I also draw upon the rational choice theory to situate my research on contemporary Sufism in its broader socio-consumer landscape. I then move on to chart my fieldwork procedure, as well as the methodology and
methods that were used to select and examine my datasets. I also pay attention to issues of ethics and positionality.

3.1 Ontology

The ontology of social phenomena raises two key questions. One is whether there exists an absolute or shared reality independent of our subjectivities (realism), or if this is a product of multiple socially constructed realities, dependent on an individual’s experience (relativism) (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Between realism and relativism, Kirk and Miller (1986) and Hammersley (1992) take the position of ‘subtle realism’. They hold the ontological view that phenomenon exists independent of human knowledge, alongside the epistemological claim that this reality cannot be directly accessed. Thus, we only have representations of social phenomenon as human knowledge is fallible. As such, “there can be multiple, non-contradictory and valid descriptions and explanations of the same phenomenon” (Hammersley 1992, p.51). In research, subtle realists hold the view that different methods produce alternative perceptions among participants, so we can only know reality from our own perspective. This acknowledges how the positionality of the researcher can influence the research process. As found in theories of social constructionism, the researcher’s findings are one of many versions of reality (Beckford 2003). This ontological approach supports the use of qualitative methodologies where we can assess the perceptions that participants share.

3.2 Epistemology

Interpretivists encourage the use of qualitative methods to gain knowledge of the social world. They seek to uncover the meanings of social actions and discover how their participants understand social reality (Weber 2003). Researchers adopt ‘verstehen’, the interpretive understanding to uncover the meanings and intention behind a person’s action or expression (Bernstein 1976). This process of observation and interpretation is known as 'interpretivism'. However, researchers use their own preconceptions to guide their research process and their interaction with respondent’s can impact their participants’ perception (McIntosh 1997). This will be discussed at length in the section on ‘reflexivity’.
Under interpretivist social theory, theories emerged on ethnomethodology, oral history and symbolic interactionism. Ethnomethodology is an interpretivist approach which attempts to understand the methods people use to make sense of the social world and how these methods are used to produce meanings (see Garfinkel 1967; Silverman and Walsh 1972). These thinkers see social order as an accomplishment, which members of society have actively constructed using their common-sense knowledge. Similarly, symbolic interactionism developed as a theory to study symbolic meanings and interpretations attached to social actions and to determine their effects (Mead 1934; Blumer 1969). Lastly, oral history was used as a method to discern people’s stories, to understand their experiences and social constructions (Plummer 1983).

Phenomenology is also an interpretivist approach. A key thinker associated to phenomenology is Alfred Schutz (1899-1959). He builds on Edmund Husserl’s (1859-1938) understanding of phenomenology as a philosophy and a theory of knowledge.

“Phenomenology asks us not to take received notions for granted. It asks us to question them— to question nothing less than our culture, that is, our way of looking at and being in the world in which we have been brought up” (Wolff 1979 p.500, italics in original).

Schutz argues meanings are unclear, so we make sense of our world through constructs and shared categories known as ‘typifications’, which allow us to communicate and cooperate (May and Powell 2008, p.91). It appears the world is orderly and neutral, when in fact it is a construction produced by typifications (see Schutz 1967; Schutz 1970).

“Instead of focusing on culture, phenomenology focuses on our lived experience… Phenomenology suggests that readers have to understand that researchers’ projects allow them to understand understanding, not reality” (Davis 1995, p.124).

Therefore, phenomenology allows researchers to both describe observed reality and the individual experience of reality, without limiting observations to descriptions (Neisser 1959). This is the epistemological foundation of this project.
The method by which knowledge will be acquired is partly through an inductive ‘bottom up’ approach (Lodico et al. 2010). I begin with initial observations of the contemporary Sufi milieu that has largely escaped academic attention, and a tentative hypothesis that some young British Muslims are engaging in post-*tariqa* Sufism (see Chapter Two). My proposition further questions whether the existing research on Sufism in Britain reflects the empirical realities. This will contribute towards developing a typology that can account for the multidimensional ways young Muslims engage with Sufism.

The theories I draw upon in this thesis “help explain and understand the findings of the research within a conceptual framework that makes ‘sense’ of the data” (May 2001, p.29). I begin by gathering my data and then conducting an analysis by exploring relationships and patterns between different datasets, before drawing any conclusions (Neuman 2003) (see Section 3.10). For this project, I will take the position of the methodological agnostic, by bracketing questions on how things came to exist (whilst being open to the prospect of Divine existence and the direct effect of Divine powers on human subjects), and instead focus on what people consider religious and how they use religion (Beckford 2003).

3.3 Theoretical approach: Social constructionism and Sufism

The epistemological and ontological basis for this study is informed by the underlying suppositions held in the theory of social constructionism and therefore, this study is broadly situated in this theoretical framework. Social constructionism challenges hegemonic paradigms of knowledge. It asks us to be sceptical of the how we see the world, and even our own selves.

Social constructionism invites us to question our perceptions of the world and examine how these assumptions came to exist. It opposes theories on positivism and empiricism, which claim that our observations show us all that actually exists (Burr 2006). Instead, social constructionists believe the individual constructs multiple versions of reality. We construct concepts which we then consider ‘knowledge’ (Berger and Luckmann 1967). If we merely changed the description of these concepts, our social reality will be constructed differently (Hacking 1999; Hermans 2002). Additionally, the way we imagine ourselves and the other, is
influenced by a person’s own conceptions and their exposure to different social contexts. Even our understanding of the self is relational, premised on our conception of others (Hermans 2002).

“Social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work and develop subjective meanings of their experiences...As the goal of the research is to rely on the participants' views of the situation being studied, researchers use open-ended questions for participants to share their views and for them to construct a meaning of a situation” (Creswell 2014, p.37).

It is through these processes we produce our own beliefs about the social world. These assumptions are mediated through language and shared discourse, which constructs what we know or perceive as ‘fact’ (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Thus, social constructionists do not claim to provide ‘truths’, but rather encourage one to ascertain that metanarratives and the criteria to identify social behaviours and events are demarcated by history and social context (Gergen 1999). The researcher’s purpose is to allow the participant to share their views. These are commonly derived from their subjective meanings, which are negotiated through social norms and their interaction with others (Creswell 2014).

“[Social constructionism] is a perspective that gives priority to questions about the processes involved in negotiating the meaning of social phenomena. It deploys systematic scepticism towards ontological claims about ‘reality’, preferring to study the means by which such claims are mounted, modified and challenged in everyday social life. In relation to religion, then, a social constructionist approach tries to discover how terms such as ‘religion’, ‘religious’, ‘sacred’ and ‘spiritual’ are used; how the usage varies across different categories of people, time and space; how it reflects collective interests; how human actors justify their usage of these terms; how social groups and organisations institutionalise the usage; and how social agencies try to regulate the activities to which the terms are applied” (Beckford 2003, p.193).

For studies in the sociology of religion, social constructionism is useful to understand how individuals and researchers go through a process of constructing religious boundaries to see what constitutes as ‘religious’ (Beckford 2003). Researchers provide meaning to ‘religion’ by
analysing and categorising those beliefs, experiences and practices which they perceive as ‘religious’. However, social constructionists have a,

“Sceptical attitude towards essentialist definitions of religion as well as towards high-level generalisations about religion and its supposedly generic properties. It also calls for clarity about the precise aspects of the phenomena regarded as religious that are under discussion – beliefs, feelings, actions, relationships, organisations etc” (Beckford 2003, p.18).

The process of deciding what constitutes the ‘spiritual’ or ‘religious’ is negotiated by followers of religion. Young Muslims cultivate different identities which not all Muslims will share and may even conflict with what others perceive as being ‘Muslim’ or ‘Sufi’ (Beckford 2003). Beckford (2003, p.25) explains how this can be adapted in different contexts, for example young British Muslims construct their own way of being Muslim, sometimes through intentionally referring to the religion and culture of their parents and other times negotiating and disputing this. This has also been shown through numerous other studies on the religious identities of young British Muslims (Jacobson 1998; Lewis 2007; Sammut and Sartawi 2012; Lewis 2013).

Religion is also constructed when individuals decide whether an action is in line with their faith tradition, particularly in contemporary society when there are different social issues or new technologies (Beckford 2003, p.141). Beckford (2003, p.24) provides the example of when ordinary people need to make decisions whether to use new reproductive technologies. They decide whether it is compatible with the teachings of their school of thought, or if it is religiously or not religiously acceptable depending on the circumstance. Through this they construct what can or cannot be considered religious.

In Bruinessen and Howell’s (2007) edited collection there are numerous studies through which authors take the local usage of Sufi practice to see how Sufism is socially constructed.

“[This] raises the question of whether Sufism can be conceptualised as a coherent tradition with definitive core features present in all cases to which the term is appropriately applied...what do the people who are actually involved mean by ‘Sufism’ or tasawwuf? This
immediately brings into view the considerable diversity of ways in which Sufism has been socially constructed by Muslims over the last century. The very concept of **tasawwuf** has been intensely problematized and sometimes fundamentally reworked as Muslim proponents of Sufi heritages have tried to respond to the criticisms of reformists and secular modernists” (Bruinessen and Howell 2007, p.16).

Within this volume, in a case study by Chih (2007), the author reflects on how ‘**tariqa**’ is socially expressed in modern society. Her study on the *Khalwatiyya* order in Egypt problematizes the concept of ‘**tariqa**’ and calls for us to revise its initial definition as ‘Sufi order’ or ‘brotherhood’ (Chih 2007, p.21). She disagrees with earlier historians and anthropologists (such as, Arberry 1950; Trimingham 1971) who believed that Sufi **tariqas** would eventually decline with society continually modernising and only remain amongst rural communities.

She refutes this by citing evidence on how **tariqas** have continued to operate in modern societies in a meaningful way. Instead, Chih’s study calls for a reassessment of the way we define ‘**tariqa**’, by arguing although many **tariqas** share common practices, they vary in forms of social organisation, and describing how there are different types of spiritual affiliation between master and disciple. Social constructionism allows me to conceptualise Sufism (as well as other related concepts, such as ‘**tariqa**’) in a framework that reflects on how these terms have been informed by the context in which they develop and how my interlocutors understand these notions. This will consider where definitions of ‘spirituality’ and ‘Sufism’ may overlap for participants, and also take into account internal aspects of piety that are embodied within Sufi thought (see Knysh 2017).

### 3.3.1 Researching ‘Everyday Islam’ and religion in consumer society

Considering multiple conceptualisations of Sufism by the participants who identify with this tradition is not only congruent with social constructionism but is also informed by theories about everyday lived religion (see Chapter Two, Section 2.2.5). This is a key concern in the sociology of religion as it theorises this tradition beyond Sufi orders and master-disciple
relationship, and looks to how Sufism is a form of ‘lived Islam’. I am particularly interested in a person’s ‘everyday’ experiences of Islam and how they negotiate their religious identities.

Social constructionism is useful to understanding lived Islam, as it elucidates how changing social contexts and an individual’s personalised constructions of religion impact the contemporary Muslim experience (Beck 2010; Ammerman 2013). In the case of young Muslims, their religious identities are intersectional, as it is impacted by their social milieu, ethnicity, gender and so on (Bauman 1999; Lewis 2007). This can influence religious identity, as Muslims may engage in secular practices in social activities, or religious practices outside of formal faith institutions, such as mosques and Sufi orders (Jeldtoft 2011; Stirling et al. 2014). This encounter results in religious practices becoming more adaptable and personalised; such changes are enshrined in the concept of lived religion (Stirling et al. 2014).

In order to research everyday Islam, Jeldtoft (2011) suggests researchers should look at how Muslims practice Islam in their daily lives, to see how they make sense of Islam and what they perceive as ‘being Muslim’. Previously, ‘organised’ Muslims could be recognised through Islamic movements, such as Sufi orders, resulting in institutional Islam being commonly mistaken for ‘official’ Islam (Bectovic 2011). This typically overlooked noninstitutionalised and everyday forms of Sufism in Britain.

A qualitative methodology allows me to engage with, and observe participants, in ‘everyday’ spaces, where religion is negotiated and practiced. This examines “the context of people’s everyday lives in the environment where decisions are processed and chosen, and life is lived” (Stirling et al. 2014, p.20). This includes new Islamic social and spiritual organisations outside of the tariqas, and religious expression on social media, where offline religion is translated in mediatised spaces. These spaces go beyond heteroglossic contexts (i.e. public places), where people with multiple practices and different traditions collectively engage with one another, as they may or may not be primarily organised on the basis of religion (Dessing 2013, p.40). This allows researchers to study different forms of religiosity, which do not necessarily belong to a specific religious tradition (Dessing 2013), and combines the study of individual and noninstitutional religion (Nielsen 2013).
This also takes into account the wider social processes by which people’s access and engagement with religion are shaped. As discussed in Chapter Two, Section 2.5.1, I consider the market-model of religion and the rational choice theory, which portrays how religious products and services are chosen by consumers in an unregulated religious marketplace, to see what options maximise their profit and provide them personal value (Iannaccone 1992; Finke and Stark 1998). Such theoretical models consider how contemporary religion is impacted by the values of neoliberalism, commercialisation and globalisation. Consumption fosters a modern culture of individualism where choice is a determining factor in people’s (religious) decision making (Gauthier et al. 2013). The late modern subject is a ‘prosumer’, that is a producer and consumer who both generates and extracts value from religion (Dawson 2013, p.137).

As noted in the literature review, concepts of bricolage and individualism can help theorise religion in consumer society. The bricoleur adopts syncretic religious practices although,

“...The appropriation of ‘exotic’ religions in contemporary bricolage is not random: the appropriated beliefs and practices are rooted in traditions which, over a long period of time, have been constructed and appropriated as ancient, authentic, mysterious and vibrant alternatives to a disenchanted West...[which includes] Sufism” (Altglas 2014a, p.488).

The emphasis on personal choice allows the bricoleur to take out pieces of religion or spirituality that suit the individual’s own interests and tailor this as an eclectic package (Altglas 2014b). People appropriate religious and spiritual resources and assign them meanings, facilitating (intra)religious experimentation. Through these processes religion can be (re)negotiated and reconstructed in accordance with choice and diverse socio-cultural contexts. In the case of young Muslims experience with Sufism, they can choose to expand or limit parts of their religious engagement in accordance to their subjectivities, which includes their own interpretation of what can be considered (legitimate) Sufi practice. In these circumstances, Sufism is socially constructed by those who adopt this tradition (Sharify-Funk et al. 2017).
3.4 Methodology

Building on these theoretical foundations, I now move onto discuss data collection. At this point, I consider issues of research methods and fieldwork processes. As this study endeavours to study new forms of Sufism amongst young British Muslims, my research questions (see Chapter Two, Section 2.6) could be best answered through a combination of ethnographic and netnographic methods. I used two key methods for data collection: participant observation and online (social media) research. A more detailed outline of these methods in practice is charted in Section 3.6. In this section, I discuss the key concepts when conducting ethnography and netnography, to show how my research fits into a disciplinary set of expectations and how it has influenced my choice of methods in the inquiry of contemporary Sufi expression.

3.4.1 Ethnography

Ethnography involves observations of people’s daily activities to collect data, which shed light on issues that are the focus of the research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). It helps us to understand,

“Complex features of modern life. It can show the range of cultural differences and how people with diverse perspectives react...ethnography yields empirical data about the lives of people in specific situations. It allows us to see alternative realities...” (Spradley 2016, p.16).

Ethnography holds the assumption that the social world needs to be discovered, through observations and participation in ‘natural’ settings. This help produce theoretical or ‘thick’ descriptions (Geertz 1973) of “concrete reality of particular events” which “reveal general features of human social life” (Hammersley 1990, p.598). According to Geertz (1973), ethnography is more than building rapport with participants, writing transcriptions and keeping a record of observations, it is to produce “thick descriptions” of the social context under study.
A granular ethnography goes beyond thick descriptions and stories, and “traces the grain of everyday life...therefore, faithful to the multiple ways in which everyday life is ordered and enacted” (Atkinson 2017, p.11). I take this methodological approach to support my theoretical position, as I want to explore how young people relate Sufism to their everyday lives. For ethnographic research, participant observation is a suitable method for data collection. This allows the researcher to observe social situations, see participants taking part in activities, and experience what it is like to be involved (Spradley 2016).

In the social-scientific study of religion, ethnographers can be considered ‘particularisers’, as they focus on the details and effects on small groups of people and their intentions, trying to understand individuals and communities, and connecting these patterns to help explain society at large (Spickard and Landres 2002, pp.1–2). Malinowski and Durkheim were two early thinkers in the sociology of religion who shifted from ‘generalised’ to ‘particular’ modes of social scientific inquiry through fieldwork over a long period of time, and exploring the function of religion in communities within largely shared experiences (Durkheim 1915; Malinowski 1922). These thinkers helped shape the parameters of conducting ethnography by looking at how one should immerse themselves in their field and chart their methodological processes. A later thinker and student of Malinowski, Evans-Pritchard, argued that people’s religious beliefs and practices must be understood in context, in relation to different aspects of life and culture – “a thorough knowledge of people’s language and also an awareness of the entire system of ideas of which any particular belief is part, for it may be meaningless when divorced from the set of beliefs and practices to which it belongs” (Evans-Pritchard 1965, p.7).

For contemporary religion, these traditional modes of ethnography have to be adapted. This is because today forms of religion and spirituality are not bound or fixed in one community; religious expression is becoming highly individualised and internationally dispersed, which offers new ways to understand how religion can be analysed in relation to community and other social structures (such as the Internet) (Murchison and Coats 2016, p.991). A ‘multi-sited’ ethnographic approach was first introduced by George Marcus (1995) to help understand religious forms that now exist as part of an interconnected, transnational world.
It has now become an important aspect of qualitative research. I use this approach, recognising that Sufism is both translocal and transnational, as well as having an ambition to study how this tradition is accessed and expressed by people living in different parts of the UK, and around the world.

My own approach to multi-sited ethnography is to view and participate in my online and offline field sites both on their own, in distinguished timeframes, and simultaneously. This means I may be observing online on the same day of completing research offline; conducting research offline, whilst the participants are also being livestreamed/digitally recorded; or, watching a livestreamed religious gathering on the Internet and then re-watching this once it has been recorded and uploaded either the next day, or in a couple of days. This allows me to examine religious behaviours and interactions across different spaces, and observe the movement of ideas and people between different spaces (Murchison and Coats 2016, pp.999–1000). Ethnography also allows me to research the extent to which various social systems (economy, technology etc) shift people’s experiences with religion across different contexts, that may even be linked in some ways.

Ethnographic work allows researchers to study participants in everyday settings, as opposed to contexts or conditions set by the researcher using methods of inquiry, just as people would do in day to day experiences – in participant observation this means becoming involved in the research context, listening and observing to what is happening, asking questions, having informal conversations, and drawing on a broad range of data sources (Hammersley 2019, p.3). Knowledge can be accessed, and behaviour can be studied, through informal interactions with participants, and having these engagements can produce rich and meaningful understandings of people’s feelings and motivations towards various topics of interest (Murchison 2010, p.28). I draw upon these methods to provide insights and understandings into new Sufi spaces, the manifold ways in which they operate, and the intentions and aspirations of the creators, as well as their audiences.
3.4.2 Netnography

As contemporary Sufism operates in both physical and virtual settings, I used netnographic research methods to participate and observe online Sufi expression and gatherings, to assess the different spaces in which young Muslims were accessing this tradition. I also found that I could bypass some restrictions (for instance in regards to gender segregation and time or spatial constraints), allowing me to access Sufism in ways that I could not have done through ethnographic research alone.

The Internet helps form virtual communities, that was first defined by Rheingold (1993, p.5) as “social aggregations that emerge from the net...public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace”. Christine Hine was the first to coin the concept of ‘virtual ethnography’, describing how this allowed researchers to become experientially involved in a phenomenon, albeit at a distance (Hine 2000, pp.43–44). However, it saw the practices and research methods of conducting ethnography online as partial and incomplete, as it had ‘a sense of being disembodied’ and ‘a connotation of being “not quite”...the real thing’ because it only focused on online aspects of social experience (Hine 2000, p.65). The development of the Internet over time and the role of social media in providing photo and video-based interactions has helped create a different type of virtual community. This now requires a set template of methodological practices, research ethics, and analytical frameworks, which is better defined as ‘netnography’ (Kozinets 2010).

Netnography refers to the study of online experiences and social interaction, which is more than just a ‘digital ethnography’, in so far as it does not just consider words, photographs and videos, but endeavours to study online culture and community (Kozinets 2015, pp.5–11). It also more than online research, in terms of just searching for different types of digital activity on a range of websites. It allows you to study different communities and interpret their online behaviours, similar to the way a researcher would engage in ethnography. Also, like ethnography, netnography focuses on understanding topics and people whilst keeping in mind wider complexities, contexts and meanings, as well as social culture and digitally
communicative language that is created for online use or is reflected online (including new language, symbols, emojis and so on (Kozinets 2019, p.133).

Campbell and Altenhofen's (2016, pp.3–9) typology of the four waves of research on digital religion serves as an important methodological categorisation in conducting research on social media and in recognising different points of data collection and analysis. The first wave of research was ‘the descriptive’, documenting different social phenomena of online events and key observations on how different religious groups were practicing religion online, from rituals to community. The second wave was ‘the categorical’, which went beyond the role of technology and considered the producers generating the online content. The third was ‘the theoretical’, with scholars identifying methods for analysing online research findings in relation to theoretical frameworks, to explain and conceptualise changes in relation to culture. The fourth is the current wave, ‘the integrated/convergent’ that is combining all of these research practices, whilst exploring the ways in which religion on the Internet is embedded in religious culture and behaviour, and is no longer a separate space.

In the study of religion, netnographic methods allow researchers to study people or communities on social media, who are practicing religion both online and offline. Different modes of recording on Facebook and YouTube, mean that there can often be two different types of communities that are present online: one that is only observing online (such as, viewers and people writing in the comments section) and the others who are present in the recording (in a physical and digital space) and can later view the video online once it is uploaded on to the Internet. As discussed in the literature review (Section 2.3.5), one example of this are online mehfil. For researchers using a netnographic approach, this means that they can both observe and study how different people participate in religion in a physical setting and how this is received by those who are only viewing them online, as well as the differences between the two. Here, the importance of intention, meaning and context can be understood in novel ways, just as one would consider these factors when conducting an ethnography.
Allen notes the benefits of the Internet and social media for both the production and research of religion, which allows people to use these platforms to find new forms of religious authority,

“In conjunction with the lack – or at least the perceived lack – of opportunities to engage and find a voice in the offline ‘real’ spaces, it would seem that social media will increasingly provide those immediate opportunities to not only find a voice but so too to have that voice duly valorised” (Allen 2016, p.47).

What is fascinating about social media research, is that it is somewhat incidental – by that I mean the activity uploaded on these sites are not (solely) for the purpose of academic research, and can therefore shed light on multiple forms of social phenomena – attitudes, intentions, identity and so on (Sloan and Quan-Haase 2017a, p.5). This is crucial for the study of young Muslims’ experience with Sufism, as this methodology also helps answer broader questions on their engagement with religion. The methodological practices in this study helped me to define some of the parameters of netnography as the study of religion (and Sufism) on social media is an emerging field, thus research practices are continually developing (Bunt 2009; Cheruvallil-Contractor and Shakkour 2016; Burgess et al. 2017; Sloan and Quan-Haase 2017b). These will become apparent throughout the remainder of this chapter.

3.5 Sampling

My choices of field sites were informed by the literature review, my theoretical approach and research questions. This also helped navigate my choice of methods. I began with preliminary research, identifying the most pertinent Sufi groups or forms of Sufi expression in offline and online spaces (based on website data and social media following), that had escaped academic attention, primarily because they had only emerged – or grew in reputation – over the last five years (since 2014). I methodically listed these in reference to my research questions, exploring which forms appealed most to young British Muslims. This knowledge largely emerged from my positionality as a researcher, and my research proposal prior to undertaking this doctoral study. I had identified new Sufi expressions and the basis of much
of this empirical data forms the following chapter, ‘Mapping the contemporary Sufi scene’. This is an important foundation of this study, as it informed my fieldwork choices.

It was important for me to recognise where Sufi expression amongst young British Muslims had been left unnoticed, and how, by sharing certain demographics with my interlocutors, I could contribute to the field. Having said that, I must add a disclaimer that I am not a member of any of the groups I have studied. I had become aware of their existence due to my interactions with other young Muslims. Initially, part of my understanding of the British Muslim Sufi ‘scene’ emerged through networking, by conversing with my own contacts about the types of Sufi gatherings they either attended or were aware of. In this way, I could undertake a degree of purposive sampling (see Emmel 2013). I was then introduced to, and/or I subsequently contacted, the founders, organisers, religious actors and attendees, via informal telephone conversations from February-March 2018. I made them aware that the information they shared would be written down and form part of my data gathering process. I also supplemented this with online research using the Internet and social media. For this reason, much of Chapter Four is grounded in data from observations, informal discussions and narratives, social networking and website data from 2016-2020. I argue its empirical significance in relation to the reflexive exercises undertaken in this study.

3.6 Methods

I completed my fieldwork over a total period of twelve months, out of which seven months were dedicated for offline fieldwork to my two field sites. I split my time between field site one, Rumi’s Cave (3 months) from Oct-Dec 2017, and field site two, Guidance Hub (4 months) from May-August 2018, attending events as they were scheduled. The process behind the selection of these two centres is captured in the following chapter. The full twelve months were used for social media research on Facebook and YouTube of youth naat reciters (seven British-Pakistani men and a naat organisation, the Youth Quran Naat Council, YQNC) and a Sufi shopping site (Barakah Base).

3.6.1 Participant Observation
Participant observation can be considered both a data collection method and a tool for data analysis (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). As Atkinson writes (2017, p.5), for ethnographers it is imperative to think analytically whilst conducting fieldwork, not by predetermining what we will find, but to have guiding thoughts to help us with our enquiry. Atkinson's (2014; 2017) advice on ethnographic methodologies helped guide my fieldwork processes, from organising and writing my fieldnotes, to impression management and reflexivity amongst participants, and lastly to methods of data analysis.

I was both a participant observer and observer,

“Participant observation in which the researcher joins the constituent study population or its organisational or community setting to record actions, interactions or events that occur. This not only allows phenomena to be studied as they arise, but also offers the researcher the opportunity to gain additional insights through experiencing the phenomena for themselves... Observation offers the opportunity to record and analyse behaviour and interactions as they occur, although not as a member of the study population. This allows events, actions and experiences and so on, to be 'seen' through the eyes of the researcher...” (Ritchie and Lewis 2003, p.35, italics in original).

On one or two occasions, I was left quite disconcerted when I had pre-arranged participant observation with the main organisers in field site one, but on the day the event was being managed by an outworker. The outworker was someone affiliated to a different organisation, but was using the premises to host an activity they had prepared. These were often paid events, which required preregistration, and the profits were usually gifted as donations.

The instructor initially appeared to be a little irritated by my presence, although I had previously informed the managers at Rumi’s Cave that I would be attending. She was quite abrupt in her approach and raised concerns that I had to be committed to the four-week course and asked why I hadn’t registered, but I politely explained that Rumi’s had permitted me to be seated and rules around registration weren’t applicable to me as I was a researcher. Around 20 mins into the session the instructor approached me and apologised for ‘being short
with me’ and explained that she wasn’t feeling too well and that I was welcome to sit and research (fieldnotes, 24/10/2017).

Whilst this particular situation left me a little embarrassed at the start, especially as our encounter was quite public, in front of the people I was planning on observing, I had to remind myself I was a researcher and kept my conduct professional.

In such cases, being only an observer, and not a participant, my methods were partly restricted,

I was unable to take part in these more intimate discussions due to the class structure/nature and I was an ‘observer’ in this particular class and not a ‘participant’ (fieldnotes, 24/10/2017).

As a participant observer I was more immersed in the field and this enabled me to build a rapport with the attendees. My interlocutors would speak to me more casually, and these discussions were far more insightful, as they captured young Muslims’ genuine opinions, thoughts and ideas about different religious and social phenomenon. They were also intrigued to know my views on a variety of different topics and I was involved in intimate conversations, which were occasionally asked to be kept private or away from the organisers.

Within observations, everyday conversations were used as an informal interview method and helped elicit interesting anecdotes from my interlocutors. My prior research experience and theoretical positioning shaped my data collection choices. I chose to substitute formal interviews for informal conversations that were recorded in my fieldnotes. This is because I have previously found the more detailed and ethnographically perceptive insights emerged organically within ordinary conversations, whereas when a dictaphone was placed in front of respondents they became nervous and uneasy. This limited their responses as they were careful to omit information they assumed may be controversial, and carefully observed my reaction to monitor whether their reply was the ‘correct answer’ I was looking for. They also feared the impact of their words being scrutinised when audio-recorded.
Including conversations in observations reduces the risk of misinterpreting participants’ behaviour (Hammersley 1990). Open, freely held discussions could best capture everyday religious experiences (Dessing 2013; Woodhead 2013), particularly amongst young respondents who wanted to share their thoughts incidentally and digress from topics other than Sufism. As dialogue on religion can raise sensitive topics, respondents were able to have open discussions and face-to-face interactions, where such conversations could be held freely and nonjudgmentally. This was captured in my fieldwork, and I felt reassured that this was the best choice of methods, when occasionally participants asked me to hold “off the record conversations” (fieldnotes, 24/11/2017) or whispered (so that they would not be heard by the Islamic teachers) about the (nonreligious) social activities they would take part in, outside of their attendance at the centres (fieldnotes, 05/08/2018).

The reliability of informal interviews could be brought into question as the conversations are not usually recorded as verbatim and neither are they transcribed. It relies on the researcher’s interpretation and memory of events. There may also be interviewer bias, through non-verbal cues and body language, which may impact the validity of the respondent’s answers. However, I navigated these issues as I had interpersonal skills and would ask my participants follow up questions. I also kept scratch notes to help remember key details of conversations just after they had occurred. I was aware that the informal interviews were not usually representative, but these nuanced exchanges were an integral part of my research as they helped me to understand the diverse lived experiences of young Muslims.

During my fieldwork, my methodological choices allowed me to be mindful of Goffman’s (1959, p.112) theory of social behaviour being either ‘frontstage’ (a performance based on what people want us to see) or ‘backstage’ (natural behaviour). This is also known as the ‘Hawthorne effect’, because of the researched behaving differently due to the presence of the researcher (Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939; Quraishi 2008). Furthermore, during observations it was imperative for me to be critical of anyone claiming to tell me “what really happens” or “the truth” because it was their version of the truth, and a construct of imagined realities. I therefore remained sceptical of any suggestions of literature, viewpoints and ideas given by others (Wolcott 2005), whilst acknowledging their suggestions.
I wrote my fieldnotes in different ways, according to the format of the activity. If the event was more formal or academic, I could take my laptop with me to write notes during the session. On other occasions, I would take a small notebook to record my fieldnotes and personal reflections (a journal of my own thoughts on what I was observing to help with evaluating my findings) and then typed this up at the end of the day. I also kept a pocketsize notepad for scratch notes, to remind myself of key occasions, where writing notes would be considered inappropriate, such as during retreats or collective religious gatherings.

I had a small notebook for scratch notes during the evening dhikr. I did not write up notes during the dhikr out of respect for the religious practice, and because I was busy ‘participating’. However, I tried to make notes where I could, or when the group were busy talking between themselves (fieldnotes, 05/08/2018).

I began fieldwork with descriptive observations, to provide a broad outline of what was happening in the social situation under study, and after this initial data was recorded, I narrowed down my research to make more focused observations (Spradley 2016, p.107). The ‘descriptive records’, described the venue/setting, scene, what was happening and types of people who were in the audience. I also kept a record of ‘daily activity’, which included details of the types of events I attended, what happened, what was observed, who attended, and what was said.

Lastly, I documented the challenges and hindrances I encountered in the field, which commented on what I may have missed, what I did not have access to, what could not be captured and the reasons why. As a researcher, it was essential for me to remain critical of my own fieldnotes, as I was documenting what I was seeing through a lens of my own interpretation (see Section 3.3), and I was citing events according to what I considered significant. This is because fieldnotes cannot possibly cover everything a researcher sees/hears/imagines. I therefore noted details of anything worthy of attention, such as mundane activities which may initially appear insignificant, for example the ways in which people were seated.
I organised my fieldnotes chronologically, attending events as they were scheduled by the organisers at my field sites. I anonymised verbatim accounts and summarised discussions from informal interviews in my field notes. The key theories and concepts that were identified in the literature review provided direction to this study and were useful points of reference (Atkinson 2017, p.8).

I also conducted basic social media research on the Facebook pages for my two field sites to supplement the research from my participant observation. This information was public and helped me to understand the different ways Sufism was marketed online to see how the different advertising techniques on social media influenced young Muslim audiences. This method partly emerged from the data gathering process, as during my observations many interlocutors spoke of accessing Sufism and becoming aware of Sufi-inspired organisations through social media.

### 3.6.2 Social media research as a netnographic method

Social media is one of the most popular online activities, with statistics predicting by 2023 there will be approximately 3.43 billion users worldwide. Facebook is the most popular social media networking site with 2.5 billion active monthly users. Social media allows both “the creation and exchange of user generated content” (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p.61). It may be argued that social media research is simply online research and therefore cannot be considered a netnographic research method (Kozinets et al. 2014). However, my data collection choices contained key features of a netnography, so this study was using a netnographic ‘approach’, rather than following a defined template of netnography. As discussed earlier in Section 3.4.2, this entailed studying the behaviours and practices of online communities.

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25 ‘Number of social media users worldwide from 2010 to 2023’

26 Ibid.
Having recognised that Sufi expression online intersects offline and online religion, I chose to conduct research on Facebook and YouTube, as these were the two prevalent social networking sites that captured the views, events, activities of young Muslims’ engagement with Sufism in audio, visual and written formats. As discussed in earlier research, these sites are,

“‘Visual phenomena’ in their own right, as the ‘means of circulation’ for visual objects of all kinds, as the ‘means of visualising’ culture and social life, as sites for new ‘visual practices’, as diverse contexts for the interpretation of the visual, as visual modes of participation” (Sloan and Quan-Haase 2017b, p.217, quotation marks in original).

Facebook allows users to upload audio-visual content (photographs, videos, sound clips), status updates and comments for people to interact with other users, timetable of past and upcoming events, and links to different websites. Alongside personal user profiles, there is the option for people to create individual ‘public figure’ pages or pages representing an organisation. This allows people to curate an online ‘e-personality’ (mis)representing themselves in their unique ways (Yang et al. 2017) which can impact on religious authority (Bunt 2018).

YouTube’s interactive features also allow users to publish and view digital videos online (both pre-recorded and livestreamed), as well as, provides opportunities for user text production, such as text attached to videos; comments, and users can upload videos of themselves speaking to the camera (namely, ‘vlogs’) about topics of interest (Pihlaja 2016, p.49).

I made use of all of these different social media features when gathering and collecting my data online. This allowed me to see how different religious actors used social networking to communicate alternative types of religious messages and observe them in different social and religious settings. Certain types of video content, such as vlogs and livestreamed events, were more revealing of the person’s daily activity and shed more light on everyday forms of Islam in more natural settings, such as performances in cars, wedding halls, birthday parties and other events,
“When it comes to the visualization of Islam, it should be noted that videos on YouTube are more emotional and explicit than footages in the mainstream media. Images that would be inappropriate to be broadcast on television repeatedly appear in user-created content” (Mosemghvdlishvili and Jansz 2013, p.496).

It is not unusual that Sufi-inspired content amongst young Muslims was recorded in cars, because as shown in previous research, these spaces are usually used as affordable places for them to ‘chill’ and ‘hang out’ (Bolognani 2009, p.143).

YouTube videos also showed the uploaders interactions with the people around them and their audiences, as the camera flipped and changed at different angles, from frontal ‘selfie’ mode, to the back camera, showing the audience and venue around them. This showed me how young Muslims were drawing on bricolage and an array of different religious resources (see Altglas 2014b). As shown in earlier findings of Sufism online, the Internet allows young Sufis to discuss or make strong statement about their faith and beliefs and articulate their religious understanding in a way that is personal and individualistic (Cheruvallil-Contractor 2016, p.60).

As discussed in Chapter Two, Section 2.5.4, there has been limited online research which has documented Sufi manifestations on social media. I therefore tested new, innovative research methods to capture and analyse religious expression on these sites.

I observed and conducted online research as an ‘outsider’, by impartially gathering data, rather than an ‘insider’ who participates in the online experience being studied (Salmons 2017). However, I recognise the insider/outsider dichotomy may not be appropriate to account for my research experience, as to some extent I am acquainted with the type of community I am studying. Therefore, unlike previous researchers I did not have to ‘become’ a part of the online community to facilitate my understanding of the language or practices of the online participants (Cheruvallil-Contractor 2016, p.69), as we already shared many socio-demographical features,
“In my work on online Sufism, I discovered a community that had social systems, hierarchies and what may best be described as a culture of its own. To research this community, I first had to become part of it, I had to understand its language and know its people. I then used traditional research methods that I tweaked and adjusted to suit the needs of my digital research site... More significantly I had to reflect on the dynamics and particularly the ethics of doing research online” (Cheruvallil-Contractor 2016, p.69).

Furthermore, as a netnographic method and as a form of qualitative content analysis I incorporated ‘direct analysis’ as fieldnotes (Collier 2001) of Facebook and YouTube videos, comments and status updates and photographs. This was as straightforward as “identifying objects evident in photographs...[and] subtle analyses of symbolic communications that can be unconsciously determined from a physical space”, which were then later inductively analysed in detail through the development of codes (Julien 2008, p.121). Similarly, videos were analysed as a form of social interaction, finding videos of interest through ethnographic approaches and later developing codes to analyse the clips, just as one would during grounded theory (see Section 3.10) (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Pennington 2017).

During this process of direct analysis, I wrote down what I could see/identify. The data collection methods followed similar processes to my ethnographic field notes. I wrote down what was being represented, and the different feelings and questions which came to mind during my observations as ‘reflections’ (Collier 2001), the activities and discussions being held (in both the recorded or live event and in the ‘comments section’), as well as the number of views, ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’. These latter features were found on the social networking sites, which helped me to make sense of user engagement. I supplemented the direct analysis with an online social media tool called ‘NCapture’, that is available on the latest versions of the qualitative data analysis software programme, NVivo.27 This tool was only made available on downloading Google chrome and installing this as an ‘add in’, see Figure 1.

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27 NVivo software, found at QSR International https://www.qsrinternational.com <last accessed 08/05/2020>.
Through NCapture I was able to download and seize information from the user Facebook pages, such as all status updates, comments and photographs. It also captured basic public information about every user who had engaged with the main profile (only if they had already supplied this biographical data on Facebook), which helped me to understand the types of audiences online. This sometimes included: age, location (to determine if the user was UK-based or international), religion and gender. This is referred to as ‘auto-coding’ in NVivo v.11.

Social media also allows people to communicate via emoticons or ‘emojis’, and this can almost be considered a form of online language, as it can capture users’ feelings and reactions, such as happy, angry, upset, shocked, and so on. These different online characteristics provided me with an indication of different types of online interactions and how social media users are engaging with the uploaded content. I could not use NCapture for YouTube, as this feature was not available at the time, and therefore my direct analysis data was more insightful.

There are multiple challenges and opportunities of doing research online as identified by previous scholars, such as completing research work remotely, easy access to large volumes of prewritten material and text-based interactions that are easy to make record of (Perttierra 2018, p.96). I also found that the NCapture feature quickly lifted the online user’s social media posts which made the process of online analysis much faster (although ironically at times this caused the NVivo software to crash which resulted in long waits for the software to update before accessing other aspects of my coded material).
Another benefit that I consider of social media data analysis is the aspect of ‘lurking’ (Kozinets et al. 2014, p.263) – whether this is intentional or unintentional – as it reveals facets of user’s social interactions in different settings, contexts and over different time periods. One example of this is in my own research, is that when establishing a timeline for some of the *naat khwaans* in this study, to observe when they first grew in popularity online, I saw the differences in their interactions prior to this period. Albeit this (public) information was not included in my study and my knowledge of this was somewhat incidental, it provided me an added insight that I simply could not overlook or forget so easily. It shaped a better understanding of who they were before they acquired a celebrity status and this in turn helped me to understand how religious authority may be developed.

However, the benefits of participant observation were the organic, candid conversations and therefore I re-emphasise the significance of informal interviews. Participants could contextualise their thoughts, and there was room to ask additional follow-up questions. I could also observe people’s behaviours in more organic settings which helped me to understand their motivations for engaging in Sufism. There was no auto-coding feature, as there was for the social media posts, however this proved equally beneficial as it gave me more time to engage with my data and conceptualise this in relation to my theoretical frameworks. Lastly, although collectively my field sites led to large volumes of data, during the analysis I felt reassured that my choice of methods were effective to investigate the heterogeneity of contemporary Sufi expression (Section 3.10).

### 3.7 Data storage

Approximately, the total number of data collected was 204,728 words. Here is a breakdown of figures:

**Participant Observation:**

Field site one, Fieldnotes = 16,372 words  
Field site two, Fieldnotes = 17,931 words  
Data total: 34,303.
Online Research and Netnography (estimated figures as exact number cannot be determined on social media):

Social media pages of 7 naat khwaans and one naat channel over last 3-5 years, including status updates, videos, pictures, as well as additional comments by fans and users.
20 words per post, posting 3 times a week over 5 years = 15,600 x 8 = 124,800 words.

Naat khwaani Direct Analysis data = 19,176 words.

Barakah Base Direct Analysis on their Facebook Personal Account over 2.5 years, including status updates, pictures and comments = 12,649 words
Public Page (has less posts than personal page over 2.5 years) = 12,500 words average
Additional comments by fans and users: min. 2 people interacting per post, av. 5 words per comment = 1,300 words average
Online research data total: 170,425 words.

Data storage was handled according to Cardiff University’s ethical guidelines (see Appendix One). All handwritten fieldnotes and scratch notes were stored in a locked cabinet at my personal residence. Typewritten fieldnotes and the NVivo project were saved on my password-protected laptop and in password-protected files on an encrypted USB drive. Subsequently, they were uploaded onto a private OneDrive account, to secure the storage of personal records and prevent loss of data.

3.8 Ethics

Ethical practice is a key aspect of social research, as it ensures both methodological rigour and our ability to protect the privacy of our interlocutors. My ethical inquiry informs the reasons behind the choices of methods and “action in the conduct of social research” (May 2001, p.59). I received ethical approval to conduct ethnography and netnography, including my specific choice of methods, from my faculty’s ethics committee in the School of History, Archaeology and Religion (SHARE), Cardiff University (see Appendix One). The research design
ensured adherence to the ethical codes of practice as expected of scholars in the sociology of religion and cyber methodologies.

Prior to conducting fieldwork, I received consent from the organisers at both field sites (see Section 3.9.1 on researcher access) to carry out fieldwork, take photographs of the building and name the organisations. As a relatively niche research area, and to avoid traceability, no names of the individuals with whom I conducted the research were mentioned in this study (both offline and online), although organisations were named as public bodies. This decision was made in relation to previous research,

“Concealing names, especially those of organizations and places, often doesn’t preserve external confidentiality unless all potentially identifying details are obscured, which in turn can undermine the importance of meanings in names and the significance of findings” (Guenther 2009, p.418).

The managers in both field sites seemed to be quite keen for their organisations to be named, as they believed it could increase their reputation and outreach. In my written findings I kept to this, but I did not name the individual respondents who attended or even worked for the organisations to protect their anonymity and the interests of the organisation (Guenther 2009, p.417). When citing material or informal interviews and quotes from respondents, I used pseudonyms or quoted them anonymously to protect their identity. I did not directly photograph any participant, and when pictures were taken, I had cropped or blurred their faces to respect their privacy, especially as both field sites were also religious spaces.

As discussed earlier, there were a couple of occasions where respondents, both attendees at the centres and participants, did not want me to make record of certain activities or conversations. They wanted to share information or allow me to participate in events to provide ‘me’ with some contextual information, but not to log this as a ‘researcher’. This conveyed to me that my interlocutors had built a strong rapport with me and I respected their privacy. My positionality was a key factor in building this trust. Respondents were occasionally wary that their views could be misconstrued in written research and they wanted to be
perceived to adhere to broadly accepted Islamic practices, even though not every event was religious or Sufi in nature.

I understood particular religio-cultural sensitives and had to omit notes on certain observations as they were cultural could be deemed improper or irreligious by some people. The group leader requested that it “doesn’t go outside of the room” but was meant to “help the group to bond” (fieldnotes, 05/08/2018).

Occasionally, researcher confidentiality was implicitly requested,

I put down my pen and put away my notebook when I felt some shared very personal experiences from their personal encounters...Some people had even explicitly mentioned that they wished for the conversations to remain ‘in the room’ (fieldnotes 25/10/2017).

It was agreed that due to the nature of their schedule of events, which were sometimes ad-hoc and brought about new participants each time, instead of announcing my presence at the start of the gathering (which would have been awkward and slightly disruptive), I could leave a research flyer. On the research flyer I had brief details about my project, my researcher presence, options for consent, confidentiality and contact information – particularly for anyone who wanted to be omitted from the study (see Appendices Three and Four). It also notified them that the data may be published and that I will be taking photographs and use verbatim quotations where necessary. On the flyer all participants were also notified of the option to approach the organisers and/or myself, to withdraw or abstain from the study.

Managers at both centres agreed that individual consent was not necessary, and even expressed that this could unnecessarily alarm some individuals. The research information sheet was posted on both organisations’ noticeboard in their main communal area. During retreats or events held outside of the main building, I, or the manager, simply announced my presence to the respondents and verbally told them the information on the poster. This ensured transparency of the research aims, and consistency in ethical practice (Dawson 2014). In field site one, towards the middle of my fieldwork I was given a ‘volunteer’ badge,
so that outworkers did not charge me for paid events and could be reminded that consent for participant observation was pre-arranged with the managers.

In today’s information society, it is important that when collating research data offline and online, the researcher does not invade the person’s privacy (May 2001, p.66). Navigating ethical considerations for Internet and social media data can be difficult (Hutchings 2016, p.107), especially as the features on such websites are constantly surfacing and thus the regulations for this type of research are not fully developed (see Beninger 2017; Sloan and Quan-Haase 2017b). For online research and access to Internet sources, there are problems surrounding how to represent the data and whether one should include direct quotations or excerpts from websites that may risk traceability of the participant. There may also be cases where individuals have not fully explored the privacy options of a social media site, or a public profile may contain comments from other users, “which creates data-rich profiles of other people, largely beyond their knowledge or control” (Auld et al. 2013, p.550).

Furthermore, there are issues of what constitutes ‘public’ or ‘private’ data, as registered users on social media can often access a different set of data compared to those completing a general search without logging in to a personal account. Those who argue online social media data is public, argue that these sites are free to join (almost a half of all Internet users worldwide), which is a larger potential audience than any print-based texts like newspapers or magazines that are commonly considered public (Townsend and Wallace 2016). Due to the debates surrounding the ethics of the Internet and social media, there is further ambiguity to whether researchers should seek consent when quoting material found online.

“On social media research it is commonly understood that conversations are generally public and viewable by almost anyone, and as such the individual under observation may or may not be aware of the presence of a researcher. This can lead to the likelihood of “social observational bias”. Users may participate in social media for different reasons (e.g. personal or professional) and this can affect the type, sincerity and direction of the user’s comments,
which may be unrecognised by the researcher” (BSA Guidelines: Ethics for Digital Research, 2015).28

For those who claim social media research is public, argue users have agreed to third party access, which includes access by researchers (Townsend and Wallace 2016). However, those who dispute this, assert research ethics cannot be overlooked merely because the data is seemingly public (Boyd and Crawford 2012).

I managed these issues in my study by only accessing YouTube and Facebook social media pages, as it is simpler to distinguish between what constitutes ‘public’ or ‘private’ data. All content on YouTube is openly public, unless otherwise stated. Otherwise, the content will appear blocked, because the videos are explicitly private and for personal viewing only. Public data on Facebook can be identified by looking at the icons next to each post and personal profiles will either have a large following (usually over five thousand) with the majority of the posts set to ‘public’. This means these personal profile pages can viewed regardless of whether one is ‘friends’ with the account holder which makes the profile public. ‘Official pages’ which are created by certain users, or their followers, are always set to ‘public’. All the content on these pages can be viewed by every Facebook user, regardless of whether one has ‘followed’ or ‘liked’ the page. On Facebook, I only accessed data from ‘outwardly’ public pages and public (personal) social media profiles, where the privacy setting explicitly indicated the material is available for public access, or the users had followers in the thousands.

Facebook accounts only allow a maximum number of five thousand ‘friends’. Thereafter a ‘follow’ button appears for people to stay updated on a user’s public activity. Including material from personal accounts alongside public pages was necessary to gather supplementary information. This was only carried out on three occasions, once I had assessed that: a) there were not enough posts on the public page, b) the number of followers were

significantly larger on the personal accounts, and c) the public pages seemed to have emerged due to the sizeable number of followers on the individual user profile.

I chose not to carry out research on Snapchat and Instagram, as it is not always possible to distinguish between public and private data. Users can only access these applications in their full capacity on mobile phones and tablets. On Instagram, many public figures constantly go back and forth from making their account public to ‘private’, making it only accessible for existing followers.

As discussed in research on the ethics of social media research,

“We need to balance the concerns of our participants with our desire to research and understand social behaviour. Online and social media research has the potential for unearthing new understandings and adding unique insight to existing knowledge about social phenomenon, but the ethical implications require on-going scrutiny” (Beninger 2017, p.71).

To ensure an ethical approach to data collection, I limited the number of posts I gathered and analysed according to a ‘timeline’. My direct analysis facilitated this process as I could see at what point a user became a religious public figure according to their uploaded content. I only viewed posts after this point, once they became ‘viral’ and their posts and following reach increased in the hundreds and thousands. I did not include any data which shared personal information, only that which was related to religious and Sufi expression and their lifestyles as a faith-inspired public figure. I also kept names of key online figures anonymous throughout this study and chose to discuss their work collectively. To avoid traceability, I did not provide any specific examples of any central issues they shared or may have been involved in. This ensured I was following ethical practice when accessing online content as a ‘researcher’ and not as a ‘worshipper’. My theoretical lens during the data gathering process also ensured this, as I was not judging religious actors or their activities in accordance with my religious views, but rather analysing behaviours in relation to my theoretical frameworks.

NCapture could download all the data on the Facebook profile and/or page, and this could not be restricted in any way. Again, I managed this quandary by limiting what I viewed
according to my timeline. Once I imported the data into NVivo, I used the ‘auto-coding’ feature to help me to easily view all of a user’s social media posts in an orderly way on the same page. This also helped to see the comments of online followers and how they interacted with each post. Although I viewed this data, I rephrased user comments to avoid traceability and did not disclose any of their names and personal or biographical data.

3.9 Reflexivity and Methodological Reflections

Across the numerous academic conferences where I have presented my research, I was often questioned, by both Muslim and non-Muslim researchers, as to whether the forms of religious expression I witnessed could be considered ‘authentic’ or ‘correct’ Sufi practice. Some people believe contemporary Sufi expression is superfluous, which detracts its simplicity. They argue that these forms of Sufism no longer necessitate abstinence from the world and suppression of one’s desires, the very principles that once necessitated people to follow this idiosyncratic Islamic tradition. At times, I was also left conflicted, between knowing there may be something very anti-Sufi in some modern forms of practice, while also being a way of preserving Sufism in some form.

As a qualitative researcher it was essential for me to be reflexive in my approach. Reflexivity encourages researchers to consider how their positionality can impact the data gathering process. Through this practice, researchers can document their preconceptions to show how this can affect the research setting. I had to recognise that what I observed was conditioned by my own background, and that other researchers may gather different results (Angrosino and Mays de Perez 2000).

From a social constructionist perspective, reflexivity questions to what extent reality is independent of the researcher’s subjectivities, as their preconceptions can shape knowledge claims (Symon and Cassell 2012). Researchers usually bring their own opinions into the research field (Giorgi 1986). Preconceptions however differ from bias, because if reflexivity is well maintained, the scholar’s personal background becomes a valuable resource for research (Malterud 2001).
I was neither an insider nor outsider to the forms of Sufi expression I engaged with. However, I could be considered an ‘indigenous ethnographer’ which meant that there were numerous points of relation between myself as the researcher and those I was researching (Abbas 2010, p.125). With all of the participants in my study, we shared an interest in my field of research (Sufism), as well as aspects of my identity, including youth age range (16-35), national identity (British) and religion (Islam), a colloquial vernacular and religious knowledge. With most female respondents, I shared gender identity, and as well as similarities in dresswear, which was a hijab paired with stylish, modest apparel. Dressing in a similar way to the people being observed helped me with impression management, as I ‘gave off’ a message that I was adaptable and could fit in (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, pp.66–68). With Pakistani interlocutors (offline and online), I had shared cultural identities and languages (Urdu and Punjabi), which enabled understanding without translation. These had particular advantages, in facilitating dialogue and building rapport. For participants in offline spaces, my research on contemporary Sufism (instinctively) created an assumption that we have shared interests and could identify with one another.

As an ‘indigenous ethnographer’ there were fundamental tenets and cultural norms of Islam that I had to uphold, particularly in relation to gender (Abbas 2010, pp.126–127). Having this awareness made it easier to navigate conversations with respondents. Visible markers of similarity and differences between the researcher and respondent can have a critical influence on data collection. My respondents assumed I would have some sympathy with Islam and represent them in the best possible ways. This removed any scepticism of political agendas and misrepresentations in academic research. It also innately built their confidence in the intentions behind my research, putting them at ease and enabling more honest responses. As an indigenous ethnographer, I had community knowledge, an awareness of youth activities, and a familiarity with Muslim communities in Britain and our intrareligious divergences. Therefore, as a young British Muslim I had,

“An added insight that is not normally given to other scholars or researchers whose privileged status or lack of grounded empiricism can sometimes theoretically and conceptually detach them from the everyday realities” (Abbas 2010 p.131).
As religion is an area which is not always easily accessible to a non-participant, a follower of that particular path can acquire knowledge of novel layers of meaning (Knott 2005a).

Nevertheless, I stumbled across several impediments whilst trying to speak to attendees about Sufism. Both field sites held multifarious events, drawing different audiences each time, from congregational prayers to social gatherings, and so many people were not necessarily inclined to Sufism. Predominately, there were limited opportunities to have discussions with participants and when the opportunity had presented itself, I found people seemed disinterested to discuss my research, or Sufism more broadly, and preferred to socialise or form acquaintances. In addition to this, those who were attending events for the first time appeared self-effacing, whilst more regular attendees had already formed their own cliques which were difficult to penetrate.

I was also sometimes met with awkward glances when introducing myself as a researcher, which at times assumed ‘power’ or ‘religious policing’, and also scepticism (Abbas 2010). Religion and spirituality are quite private subjects and I had to approach these sensitive topics without seeming invasive. Some people were indisposed to discuss the organisation whilst attending events at the venue, becoming conscious that their views could be misconstrued if overheard by others. Some young participants had reticence sharing technical knowledge about the history of Sufism, due to my researcher status assuming I ‘knew more’. In addition to this, notetaking occasionally became difficult, as people watched me hesitantly. Occasionally, this meant stealing the opportunity to write quick scratch notes as a prompt,

I wrote some notes during the workshop but only when everyone else was writing or taking part in writing exercises so that I would not appear rude or purposely awkward. This would also avoid any suspicion (fieldnotes, 26/11/2017).

As discussed earlier, I also had to remain mindful that I could be omitting observations from fieldnotes which appear mundane or ‘ordinary’ to my pre-existing beliefs.

3.9.1 Access
In order to receive research consent, for field site one, I contacted an acquaintance who had been a volunteer at the organisation for a lengthy period of time. Due to his voluntary service, he had managed to build a strong working relationship with the managers. I informed him of my research plan and methods, and he subsequently briefed the organisers and arranged a telephone conversation. I was accepted for an initial telephone meeting with one of the principal managers, which was a pleasant informal conversation. This led to a face-to-face meeting and an invitation to carry out preliminary observations of one of their events. During this, we discussed the aims of my project, the methods I would like to use and ethical considerations. I was also given a private tour of the building.

The manager and I were both female. This facilitated dialogue as there were no cultural or religious restrictions to our interaction. My education was a key factor in enabling access, as being a Ph.D. student assumed an esteemed reputation. Despite the political climate, which leads to calls for ‘understanding’ Muslims in Britain in a rather pejorative way, my desire of wanting to understand Muslim religious experiences was considered optimistic and constructive. I was less likely to be seen as ‘suspicious’. By showing an interest and praising their Sufi-inspired activities, I showed sympathy to their cause and respect for their institution. I received permission to carry out research almost instantaneously. The timetable and length of research was also left to my discretion.

In field site two, I also contacted an acquaintance who was connected with the trustee at the organisation. This reinforced how my positionality helped me to receive access and demonstrate awareness of novel forms of Sufi expression. However, here the process was much more formal. I liaised with the trustee for nearly six weeks over WhatsApp, who then forwarded my messages to the remaining trustees and the rest of the board during their meetings. I was then invited for a formal meeting (May 2018) with 4 trustees (out of 7). One of the trustees had also recognised me from a previous event at an external organisation, where she was invited as a speaker and I had attended as a member of the Muslim community.
During the meeting there were questions around the title of my project and how I was defining ‘contemporary’. One of the trustees shared how they had apprehensions whether my choice of fieldwork site meant I envisioned them as being ‘liberal’ or ‘progressive’. I then explained that I was defining this term in reference to ‘present-day’ Sufi groups. The trustees instantly trusted my choice of methods and ethical considerations, once I informed them I had completed research at another Sufi-inspired organisation prior to this. I then received a majority vote to complete my research and was informed of this immediately. The initial meeting helped me to develop a professional relationship with the managers, who also permitted me to participate and observe paid events at no cost.

For online research, a wider awareness of contemporary Sufi expression on social media helped guide my fieldwork selections. As noted by Salmons (2017):

“By its nature social media engages people. Individuals are connected formally and informally to social and professional networks so researchers may have various degrees of relationship to the phenomenon or participants. Researchers may take advantage of these connections to gain access to a private milieu or to engage known members without an arduous recruitment process” (Salmons 2017, p.181).

Due to my personal networks within the Barelvi Muslim community, I had interactions with people who hosted youth *naat* events or were acquainted with *naat khwaans*. I was also following some of the reciters online and so I was continuously up-to-date with online performances.

Initially, I wanted to capture the differences in gender dynamics between male and female reciters online, however there was not enough data on the latter. Consequently, I had to omit this from my research. There is, however, an increase in female *naat khwaans* in Pakistan (who frequently upload their content on social media), which may lead to a proliferation in the British context. In the UK, many Muslims are more inclined to take a more conservative approach to *naat khwaani*, as they are heavily regulated by the Barelvi ulama, which could prevent female reciters from uploading their performances online. During my own
attendance at events, I have witnessed female *naat khwaani* in Britain, but this normally remains private, and is generally refrained from being uploaded on to social media.

Prior to starting online research, I had to decide on which *naat* reciters to include in my study. I carried out preliminary research to explore the reciters who were most popular, by seeing who had a sizeable fan base and following, and whether most of their social media content was set to public viewing. I also accessed *naat khwaans* and *naat* organisations’ social media pages, viewing online videos, public posts, event pages and posters, to see what kind of events and which *naat khwaans* were ‘trending’. This allowed me to note which *naat khwaans* are frequently invited to events and listened to online. This process also helped me to identify other popular *naat khwaans*, as sometimes reciters collaborated with one another, shared each other’s online videos and photographs, or tagged one another in Facebook statuses and comments sections. This initial search led me to come across a poster for the 2017 ‘Open Call’ event, which invited *naat khwaans* for onstage performances in a public park. I searched the Open Call event from 2016 and saw this had been livestreamed on YouTube.

I proceeded to contact the organiser of the Open Call on Facebook Messenger and requested permission to attend the event backstage. I wanted to discuss my project with prominent *naat khwaans*, see their interactions ‘offline’ and observe how *naat* events were broadcasted and livestreamed behind the stage. I was fortunate to receive a timely response from the organiser. This may have been due to having over seventy ‘mutual friends’ on Facebook. I believe, in some cases, to have numerous mutual friends on social media accounts can give the researcher credibility and may even unintentionally endorse the researcher. This is because it gives the impression the researcher is well connected in the community, or the illusion that they share the same denominational background due to mutual associations online.

The organiser took an interest in my research and wanted to discuss this in more detail. He knew I was a young researcher, and from my initial search online, I knew his own work was committed to helping young British Muslims to be more involved within local communities. During the event, I was invited to ‘hang around’ backstage. I spoke with many popular youth *naat khwaans*, who I would not usually have access to, both because of their celebrity style
status and me being a female. My entry backstage and into the artists’ marquee, which is otherwise restricted, and the permission I received from the organiser presumed ‘power’. It gave the impression I was reputable amongst this particular community of people and that I could be trusted.

When discussing my research with naat khwaans, I gave them an overview of my project, the research I would do on naat khwaani and the methods I would use. Although signing consent forms is not ethically necessary for online research, my transparency about the project gave me some sort of ‘unofficial permission’ to carry out my research with some of the reciters. Where possible, I would try to engage in dialogue on a one-to-one basis, but this was adapted to suit the context. When I felt a newly developing naat khwaan was disinterested in discussing my project, and more focused on building their own networks amongst the artists, my initial one-to-one discussions with some of the revered artists allowed for group conversations.

We spoke informally about the research project, as well as mutual interests and associations. We also discussed why research on ‘contemporary Sufism’ or ‘Muslims in Britain’ is necessary. This built rapport and their trust in the aims of my project. My personality is multifaceted and so to fit in with a young group of Muslims, I ensured my approach was not ‘too academic’. I avoided using jargon or theoretical concepts in conversation. Nearly every naat khwaan I spoke with used certain conversational Punjabi words which allowed conversations to flow, with some elements of humour. It also brought forward some of the more sensitive or controversial topics, which could then be discussed with ease, such as, the financial arrangements of artists, the cultural practices used in performances and their responses to the criticisms they have received by certain communities. Part of this data informed the research in Chapter Four.

3.10 Data Analysis

I analysed my offline and online (direct analysis) field notes collectively using ‘grounded theory’, whereby through an inductive analysis, new themes and concepts emerged from the data and helped generate theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Patton 1980). However, I take
Atkinson’s (2017, p.1) view that grounded theory is not merely a theory, but an approach, and therefore cannot rely on a purely inductive analysis. The literature review helped identify key themes that were to be explored within the research, and helped provide a conceptual and theoretical lens, through which I could draw upon my disciplinary knowledge to ascertain key ideas on how Sufi activity is being reconstituted (Atkinson 2017, p.4). The evaluative exercises conducted in the literature review, coupled with the fieldwork data, helped identify the key themes that were most appropriate for the focus of this study.

Drawing on everyday lived religion and the rational choice theories helped develop the theoretical underpinning of this study. I had to draw upon multiple theoretical approaches because my datasets were very diverse and revealed new forms of Sufi manifestations across different spaces. As the data in fieldnotes is selective, it would have to be filtered according to research interests (Ritchie et al. 2003). This was used to create a thematic framework or 'coding frame'. The “raw data” and happenings were analysed as “potential indicators of phenomena, which are thereby given conceptual labels” (Corbin and Strauss 1990 p.7). When analysing the data, I identified recurring themes and assigned them labels, to devise a conceptual framework or 'index', which captured the different individual categories (Ritchie et al. 2003). These categories were used to classify the ‘main themes’ (also referred to as nodes or codes) and ‘sub-themes’, which developed a succinct coding frame (see Appendix 5).

I used NVivo software to code my datasets and examine relationships between the data. I used a ‘constant comparative method’ for systematic data analysis, whereby I used “explicit coding and analytic procedures to generate theory” (Glaser and Strauss 1967 pp.101–102). I coded findings from the data into multiple categories: from where a category emerges from the data or where the data fits into an existing category, and then did a cross-comparison (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Some of these themes emerged from the data analysis process. After categorising and coding my data, I produced a short report interpreting the data to help analyse the relationships between the themes. I wrote, and re-wrote my findings multiple times, starting with descriptions and then evaluating the themes in light of the key concepts and theories I had previously identified (both in the literature review and coding frame).
(Atkinson 2014). This process was arduous in part, yet helped generate new theories, and enabled me to examine my data from different viewpoints.

For the netnographic material, content analysis was used for the field notes from the direct analysis. However, for the Facebook profiles/pages that I gathered using N Capture, I used the ‘auto-coding’ feature in NVivo. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, this helped me to view all of the posts, pictures and comments, and view user-engagement and profiles. These were auto-coded into case classifications (see Figure 2 & 3), through which I could monitor audience activity and the reception of Sufism amongst online viewers.

![Figure 2: Options to import data from N Capture into NVivo (Source: Author).]
3.11 Conclusion

In summary, the theoretical and methodological approaches as outlined in this chapter, helped formulate the best approach in providing a significant contribution to interdisciplinary fields of knowledge. Using mixed-methods for data collection and analysis helped me to approach my research questions from different angles and provide more nuanced answers (Hutchings 2016, p.104). My positionality was a key factor in enabling researcher access and awareness of new Sufi practices. In the next chapter, I outline some parts of biography that exposed me to new forms of Sufi expression and survey the contemporary Sufi field. In doing so, I justify my choice of research methods, as well as my offline and online field sites.
Chapter Four – Mapping the Contemporary ‘Sufi Scene’

4.0 Introduction

Having discussed the gaps in the academic literature, the theoretical underpinnings of this project and the methodological approach to answer my research questions, I now move on to provide an overview of the existing Sufi landscape in offline and online spaces. I focus on Sufism amongst Sunni communities, whilst acknowledging that Sufi practice exists across diverse Muslim groups (Bouasria 2015; Hermann and Terrier 2020). I also propose an extended typology to explain some of the new developments in this field. This is particularly significant and highlights an important unique contribution, because as discussed in Chapter Two, it has been over a demi-decade since the last comprehensive study of Sufism in Britain (Gabriel and Geaves 2014b). It would appear that there have been considerable developments in more recent years since 2014.

Theories of lived religion allow me to investigate myriad forms of Sufi expression that have been previously unexplored (see Chapters Two and Three). This is largely a result of limitations in access for previous researchers due to their demographics. They may be unaware of new Sufi developments because they are held in everyday spaces, and operate in ‘unofficial’ or noninstitutionalised forms (Woodhead 2013; Dessing et al. 2013). Today, changes in the sociological landscape and the popularity of the Internet mean new innovative forms of religious manifestations exist to adapt to new contexts,

“Studying religion in locality also signals a move away from the modernist regime of collecting, classifying and comparing data towards seeing religion as a plural, dynamic and engaged part of a complex social environment or habitat that is globally interconnected and suffused with power. Re-engaging it with what has traditionally been seen as its ‘context’ helps us to reconnect ‘religion’ with those other categories – ‘society’, ‘politics’ and ‘economics’ (Knott 2009, p.159)”.

In the preceding chapter, I discussed how part of this research process has been shaped by my positionality (Section 3.9). Complementary to Chapters One and Two, I would like to re-
emphasise the methodological rigour of this chapter by doing another brief biographical detour. Understanding Muslim communities has been a continuous journey for me. I was born and raised in Bolton, one the largest towns in Britain.\(^{29}\) As a member of the Muslim communities here, it always appeared to me that many religious leaders have quite a conservative outlook; therefore, any sort of change is typically viewed with scepticism and women joining congregational prayers in public mosques is usually out of the question! Children are usually placed in madrasas or taught basic Islamic studies as an after-school activity and those who miss this opportunity can often struggle to learn the basics of Islam in their adult life. There are mosques a street across from each other, yet attendees will avoid entering certain institutions for prayers due to sectarian differences. There are unresolved disputes and unexplored similarities.

In this context, British Muslims are involved in a process to try to understand themselves. There are debates, conventionally reserved for the educated and the *ulama*, which the average person is trying to make sense of. When friends gather in the streets, restaurants and shisha cafes, or when families sit and debate, or when two people decide not to get married because of differences in mosque affiliations, scholarly jargon is broken down and pieced together in a common vernacular. ‘Greenie’ and ‘Brownie’, ‘Biddati’\(^{30}\) and ‘Wobbler’\(^{31}\) often synonymised for ‘Barelvi’ and ‘Deobandi’, and ‘my mosque vs your mosque’ are all part of this attempt to interpret Islamic beliefs and assert a ‘correct’ British-Muslim identity.

In search of opportunities for further education, I studied in universities located in major cities. I spent a lot of my time in the neighbouring city of Manchester. Here, I found many differences in the Muslim communities from those I was raised in. Mosques could still be quite segregated, meaning they generally appealed to those belonging to a particular ethnicity (e.g. a Pakistani majority) or denomination (such as, Deobandi-only mosques). Nevertheless, there was a lot more diversity amongst ethnicities and across religious practice.

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\(^{30}\) Referred to ‘innovators’.

\(^{31}\) Colloquial for ‘Wahhabi’. ‘Wobbler’ is typically used by young British Barelvis to refer to anyone who opposes Barelvi *aqida* or Sufi practices. This can include the Deobandis, Ahle-i-Haidth, Salafis and so on.
The mosques were generally more ‘welcoming’, for example in allowing women to join congregational prayers and delivering wider community services, such as counselling and creche facilities.

During research for my BA and MA dissertations, my academic studies in religion and theology were celebrated as an important progress by some *ulama* in Manchester. At university, I also saw how young people could take time to study or understand the foundations of sectarian differences, host different religious speakers, and welcome diversity. It sometimes seemed as though Bolton and Manchester were worlds apart – particularly on those specific days in the year when in Bolton, despite denominational background, people run to their windows on hearing chants of ‘Allah Hoo’ or see the roads blocked off because hundreds of people are marching in celebration of the Prophet’s birthday (see Werbner 1990).

Whilst I have witnessed similarities and differences between Bolton, and the neighbouring city of Manchester, I have also observed how many towns, particularly in the North West, have changed mosque bureaucracies (or ‘masjid politics’) since first-generation committee leaders. These are becoming more inclusive to appeal to the rapidly increasing young Muslim population. This mostly happens by either holding youth activities or allowing young people to use the mosques as a venue to host their own events, such as sports or retreats, as well as granting the space for young speakers and imams to deliver lectures on topics that relate to this age group.

This exemplifies Muslim communities on a grassroots level: multifaceted, complex and often, messy. It is against this wider context I map the contemporary Sufi scene amongst young British Muslims. Although it is impossible to identify every Sufi-infused group or association, I capture some of the most popular forms of Sufi expression popular among those aged 16-35 that exist outside of the main Islamic institutions (namely mosques and Sufi orders) in Britain.

Much of what I will discuss in this chapter will be a descriptive account, premised on informal interviews and online research. Academic references will be limited because these observations are ‘behind the scenes’ that are as yet uncharted or undetected. At times,
British-Muslim academics may also overlook what they ordinarily observe in their communities because it is mundane, and non-Muslim researchers may not always be exposed to scenes outside of their research setting. For further details on the methodological practice of this chapter please refer to Chapter Three, Section 3.5.

4.1 The Heterogeneity of Sufism

As discussed in Chapter One, ‘tariqa’ is used interchangeably to both define the path of spiritual learning and to describe Sufi orders; thus many, if not all, Muslims are already engaging with tariqa in some form or another. By default, to some extent, Sufi groups have been amorphous with syncretic customs. The heterogeneity of Sufism relates to the diversity and fluidity of Sufi practice. In her research, Werbner (2002; 2003; 2009) has shown how earlier regional Sufi groups were exploratory, transnational and international, with cross-gender conviviality. They would host various types of events and social activities which showed voluntary membership, community support and hospitality. The mureeds did not always follow their parent shaykh. Many first-generation migrants left their shaykh behind in their home-country, but wanted to re-establish spiritual teachings in Europe. After conducting research about Sufism in Britain over some time, Werbner (2009) summarised how traditional Sufi practice would inevitably change when it meets the complex junctions of modernity, in addition to other advances in science, education and social action.

Werbner’s case studies (2002; 2003; 2009) illustrate the syncretism of Sufi practice, as tariqa-based groups recreated the tradition and culture they had inherited from Pakistan in the British context. However, much of this was simply replicated and reproduced. Although patterns of acculturation were noticeable, by groups adapting to, or borrowing traits from different cultures, they are more salient within modern Sufi organisations (see Gabriel and Geaves 2014; Sharify-Funk et al. 2017; Alam and Bennett 2017). New cultural experiences help develop an old form of spirituality in an innovative, contextually relevant way, which can still be rooted within tradition. This adaption allows British Muslims (and even non-Muslims) to become involved in Islamic practices in a flexible and engaging way. Many people happen to join events hosted by Sufi groups because they are interested in the type of event being held and not merely due to its relevance to Sufism (Jackson 2014).
Perhaps this is developing a ‘British Sufism’, where the cultural context of Britain is used to recreate Sufi traditions. Unlike the first and second generation of Muslims in Britain, the youth today are not just ‘importing’ practices from their culture to the UK, but are ‘exporting’ them back to their motherlands. The Internet has facilitated this eclectic flow of Sufi activity, where people are visiting different types of gatherings, both virtually and physically. Sufi groups are now offline and online, which means a group or initiative that started in Britain can be accessed by international followers.

In a competitive, fast-moving world, where much of the populace have active lifestyles, there exist a profuse number of options, and different types of gatherings, for people to come and go as they please. Although academic practice encourages researchers to place people and groups into precise, coherent categories, participation in religion and spirituality can be multifarious and convoluted. Geaves’ (2000) four-fold typology attempted to account for some of the diversity of Sufi expression amongst British Muslim groups, whilst recognising there is occasionally a significant overlap. These categories include:

i. “A loose allegiance to the Ahl as-Sunnat wa Jamaat where adherents of this kind of allegiance may not necessarily be members of a tariqa.

ii. Practicing Muslims following both sharia and tariqa but still confined to an ethnic community- membership of the tariqa will be essentially comprised of followers consisting of homogenous ethnic identity from either Pakistan, India, Turkey, the Middle East, Iran etc.

iii. Practicing Muslims following both sharia and tariqa but have transcended ethnic boundaries. In this category, the followers will have given their allegiance to a charismatic shaykh affiliated to one of the major tariqas, for example the Naqshbandi, Qadiri, Rifa’i or Alawi.

iv. The phenomenon known as universal Sufism which has departed from Sharia and has consequently transcended Islam as well as ethnic boundaries. Here the historical roots may lie in a particular tariqa but have probably outgrown the confines of its discipline and formal membership” (Geaves 2000, p.72, original spelling).

The groups identified in this typology still exist, and therefore this remains an important framework to understand Sufism in Britain. However, this typology was primarily created as
a result of fieldwork in Barelvi-centred mosques and other *tariqa*-based groups. Therefore, it cannot account for some of the later movements which have emerged from new changes in the British context (see Hazen 2016), or Sufi movements outside of *tariqas*, or the dynamic engagement of young British Muslims with Sufism ‘on their own terms’ and with frequent reference to the use of social media. My own biography as a young indigenous researcher who has had access to Sufism both inside and outside of mosques is really significant to help supplement research on Sufism in Britain. This can develop further understandings of Sufism through my awareness and access to Sufi expression in different forms.

I propose an extension of Geaves’ typology through some additional categories, whilst recognising there is no one taxonomy that can account for changes in contemporary Sufism, due to its multifaceted nature (Sharify-Funk et al. 2017). Today, many Sufi organisations have transcended ethnic boundaries, not only through cultural diversity, but by emphasising their British identities. This is often initiated by UK-born leaders and attendees, who communicate in the English language, and groups that aptly manage context-specific community issues, via events, sermons and social welfare services that are appropriate to those living in Britain. An extended typology will account for new forms of Sufi manifestations, such as on the Internet. This recognises the possibilities for transglobal identities, with *tariqas* no longer being the primary place of belonging for Sufis, and that not all Sufis have a *shaykh*-mureed relationship (Geaves 2009, pp.99–100):

v. **Multi-*tariqa* activities**: A formal allegiance to Ahl as-Sunnah w’al Jamaah and individual association to a *tariqa*. However, group gatherings are in spaces that are not necessarily confined to a particular *tariqa* or *shaykh*, or there is collective learning from multiple Sufi *shaykhs*. An example of this may be during joint religious assemblies or gatherings (*mehfils*).

vi. **Post-*tariqa* Sufism**: A groups’ ethos or mission statement may be founded on Sufi philosophy and founders may themselves belong to *tariqa*. However, their aim is to gather attendees to engage in Sufism without the pressure of a formal commitment. Similarly, many people appreciate elements of Islamic spirituality or Sufi culture and practice, but are not affiliated to any *tariqa* nor have they pledged allegiance to a Sufi *shaykh*. 
vii. Cyber Sufism: The Internet is an important medium for this type of Sufi manifestation as it provides the ability to engage with Sufism through online interactions, by watching or virtually joining gatherings and discussions. Today, social media is a readily available platform for people to engage with and negotiate religion across age, ethnicities, religious denominations and Sufi tariqas. Gatherings which were once confined to a specific space (such as, private homes) or a single gender are now publicly available to all and can also be live-streamed, therefore observed in real-time. Users can stay updated with the latest events, take spiritual guidance from more than one shaykh or tariqa and join virtual Sufi groups. On social media event leaders and group pages with similar views often share each other’s pages and posts (such as, events, teachings and advice, quotes, digital media) so an online follower can benefit from multiple types of groups on a single page.

Like Geaves (2000), I recognise the typology I have extended is not fixed and there may be some overlap. My research data in Chapters Five and Six will confirm whether these labels are appropriate to account for the youth’s Sufi experiences today. In particular, I will conduct a study of post-tariqas using my tentative description and generate a more comprehensive definition for this term, as discussed in Chapter Two.

I will now map some of the current and most influential forms of Sufi expression in the UK, which have received little, or no attention in the academic literature thus far. I place these groups on a spectrum between ‘offline’ to ‘online’, although living in a digital world means the boundaries between virtual and physical spaces are fluid and often intersect. ‘Offline-Online’ shows groups that hold a physical setting, but are increasingly moving to the digital realm (see Cheruvallil-Contractor 2014).

4.2 Offline Sufis

Offline Sufi groups refers to those with no or limited virtual presence. They may only use the Internet and new media sparingly to deliver website information, or stream the dhikr. Gatherings are mostly held within a physical place, usually in a religious infrastructure.
4.2.1 British Deobandi Sufism

In comparison to Ahl as-Sunnah Sufi groups in Britain, there is a lacuna in the academic research on Sufism connected to Deobandi traditions (see Chapter Two, Section 2.2.1). This undervalues its significance. Sufi-thought is mostly expressed through the Sharia and Sunnah by the shaykhs’ sermons in the majlis, accentuating principles of scrupulous morality (taqwa), meditation (muraqaba), self-reformation (islah), self-purification of the soul (tazkiya-e-nafs), self-purification of the heart (tazkiya-e-qalb) and self-reflection (hisaab) (Dietrich 2006; Timol 2015).

“Deobandi ulama still identify their tradition within the world of Sufism. They have terminology issues with Barelwi Sufis, and contest various practices associated with traditional Sufism as innovation or a corruption of the practices associated with the Prophet and his companions. However, acceptance of some practices may not be as polarized as some might believe. It may be more a matter of intention than practice” (Geaves 2015, p.215).

Hermansen claims the Deobandi Sufi position can therefore be considered a post-tariqa movement (Hermansen 2012, p.247), which is affirmed by Ramsey’s more recent study of the Deobandi movement in Pakistan,

“The term Sufi remains ambiguous, but it is increasingly understood to promote syncretistic practices and involvement with the occult. Nevertheless, present leaders understand fidelity to tradition to incorporate elements of tasawwuf. This adds further agreement to the classification of the Deobandi as an example of post-tariqa Sufism” (Ramsey 2017, p.118, italics in original).

There are several Deobandi Sufi groups in the UK, both Sufi-inspired and tariqa-based. From amongst the Sufi-inspired groups is the Tablighi Jama’at. Their historical foundations, teachings and practices are coloured with Sufi connotations. The Tablighi Jama’at closely follow the doctrinal lead of the reformist Deobandi movement, accepting those Sufi practices which are overtly aligned with the Sharia, including but not limited to, initiation into Sufi orders (bay’ah), dhikr and written hagiographies (tadhkira) (Dietrich 2006). Tariqa-based
groups are usually distinguished by the encouragement and acceptance of allegiance to a Sufi shaykh, who typically leads the dhikr gatherings (also referred as majlis). These are often held within Deobandi mosques and seminaries.

As a member of the Muslim community I am aware of the khanqah at Darul Uloom Al’Arabiyya Al Islamiyya, Bury established by Mawlana Yusuf Motala in 1973 and the Islamic Dawah Academy (IDA) in Leicester founded by Shaykh Maulana Muhammad Saleem Dhorat in 1991 (although I did not complete any empirical research on Deobandi Sufi sites in the UK). These are two prominent examples of Deobandi Sufism in Britain. In both sites, the shaykhs led dhikr gatherings on Thursday evenings and taught Sufism through the principles of tazkiya in their prescribed practices (ma’mooolat). They similarly taught the virtues of being God-fearing (muttaqi) and one can attain this by reflecting on the self and on life after death, reciting the Qur’an and following the Sunnah. They also spoke of the importance of reflecting on one’s daily activities by thanking God for the ability to do good deeds and seeking forgiveness through sincere repentance for wrongdoings (muhasabah). Collectively, this leads to the purification of the heart and sincerity through which one’s good deeds will be accepted. \(^{32}\)

4.3 Offline towards Online

These groups mostly operate in a physical space; however, the organisations have some level of virtual activity, either through a website, social media account or by running online courses.

4.3.1. Hijaz College\(^ {33}\)

Shaykh Allama Muhammad Abdul Wahab Siddiqi (1942-1994) was the patron and early founder of the Hijaz College Islamic University. Shaykh Muhammad built its foundations in 1982, under the name ‘Jamia Islamia’ in Coventry, before the college was established in

\(^{32}\) This information was taken from the Urdu audio recordings of Mawlana Saleem Dhorat’s lectures from the IDA website found at https://www.idauk.org/ and the lectures of Mawlana Abdul Raheem Limbada on Mawlana Yusuf Motala on YouTube <last accessed 20/05/2020>.

\(^{33}\) All of the data in this section was taken from both the Hijaz College website http://www.hijazcollege.com <last accessed 31/03/2020> but was supplemented with an informal telephone interview with the current leader Shaykh Faiz Siddiqui in March 2018. For more details about the data gathering process in this chapter please refer to Chapter Two.
Nuneaton in 1994. The college is comprised of extensive buildings and ninety-seven thousand square feet of English countryside. Approximately one hundred people live on site, most of whom are students and professionals who volunteer for the college. Although accommodation is available on-site for staff and volunteers, there are no boarding facilities for students.

Shaykh Muhammad came from a wealthy background in Pakistan. He belonged to the Naqshbandi order, initiating followers into both the Naqshbandi and Qadiri tariqas. The Shaykh moved to England so he could provide his children with better educational facilities. In Pakistan, he saw many people following ‘cult-like tariqas’. He felt it was better for people to seek knowledge and gain professional credentials, and to teach good character and service to others. He shared this vision with the migrant community living in Britain in the late 70s and early 80s. His objective was to train young Muslims in the modern and Islamic sciences. These students would later become both professionals and Islamic scholars, who can understand the needs of Muslims in modern society and lead Muslims in Europe. He also provided training on spirituality and personal development, initiating murids through bay’ah. Today, his children who are currently leading Hijaz College are considered a product of his philosophy.

“His vision was united Muslim community led by imams who would also be qualified as lawyers, accountants and doctors through graduating from British universities. He began by ensuring his own four sons, who would one day inherit work were capable of manifesting his vision. All four sons have taken on the challenge to continue their father’s religious leadership of the British Muslim community and provide guidance to the murids of the tariqa. Each of the sons is a graduate from a British university as well as being educated by their father in Islam” (Geaves 2006, p.150).

In 1994, Shaykh Muhammad was buried in Coventry, at the Old Jamia. However, before his death he had expressed his wish to be buried in Nuneaton. In 1999, approximately ten thousand people attended his reinternment and the public witnessed, what was considered a miracle (karamat). His body was intact, just as the day he was originally buried. He is

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34 This verbatim term was used by Shaykh Faiz himself during a telephone interview (March 2018).
currently buried on-site at the college. Today, he is the only Shaykh with a shrine in Europe. It is believed that at least half of all those who visit his shrine are non-Muslims, as the Shaykh would include these communities in his public engagement. His death anniversary (urs) is commemorated annually in July. Shaykh Muhammad’s son, Shaykh Faiz Siddiqui is currently his successor. His succession was announced one year prior to Shaykh Muhammad’s passing.

Shaykh Faiz considers the Hijaz College to be a facilitator for logical, rational and intellectual Sufi thinking. He informed me\textsuperscript{35} that he encourages people to “visit themselves”, through self-reflection, and “not just visit the college”. Therefore, there is little promotion of the centre nor fundraising or requests for donations (although professionals voluntarily contribute their time and money). The college host different types of events, such as character development (tarbiyah) and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) classes. Around ninety-eight per cent of attendees at the college are young people (up until the age of thirty-five). Shaykh Faiz shared that he believes the college is best suited for young British Muslims, as the older generations have their own way of thinking, and bring their particular customs, which are more cultural than Islamic. Their understanding of Sufism is different to the kind he would like to promote at the college, which is not simply ‘mystical’ but ‘grounded spirituality’\textsuperscript{36}.

The college also offers courses on Islamic Law and Theology, and dars-i-nizami programmes. Some of their courses are accredited at certain universities, providing students with direct entry onto some MA programmes. The Shaykh argues the dars-i-nizami should be taught in a rational way, by answering questions on why we should believe in a certain rule, rather than following rules blindly. The training therefore largely consists of questions and answers. Sufism is promoted implicitly, for students to find their individual path to God.

The Shaykh constantly encourages his students to be socially active, with family and friends, to create a local social community, rather than merely engaging in activities at the College. This helps cultivate their spiritual training, which is to be a good human being, before being a mureed. It is for this reason they have a small events timetable and are moving towards online

\textsuperscript{35} This data was gathered during a preliminary telephone interview (March 2018).
\textsuperscript{36} This verbatim term was used by Shaykh Faiz himself during a telephone interview (March 2018).
courses and events, although they are not particularly active on social media. There are ‘surgeries’ for people to book an appointment to meet the Shaykh and seek clarification and guidance on personal and spiritual matters. This contact is on a one-to-one basis. Other events held at the College include the monthly *gyarvein sharif*, commemorating the legacy of Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani. There is no weekly *mehfil*, as the Shaykh feels it mesmerises people and makes people disillusioned into thinking they will become lofty mystics. He believes *mehfils* are already quite common and therefore do not need to be replicated.

**4.4 Offline-Online, charity-registered Sufi groups**

There are many groups that are established by Sufi *shaykhs*, or their students, and their mission statement is constituted on Sufi principles. However, their purpose is not to promote *tariqa* association. Instead, they endeavour to promote Sufism through spiritual messages: of the Sunnah, humility, service to others, charitable giving and sacred knowledge. Such organisations have also become alternative meeting places for young people as they host youth activities, retreats and sporting events. Some of these Sufi-flavoured institutions are registered charities via the Charity Commission of England and Wales. These groups provide equal services for Muslim and non-Muslim communities to foster better community relations, whilst taking responsibility for their social and welfare needs. Here are some examples:

**4.4.1 Guidance Hub (GH)**

Guidance Hub[^37], set up in Manchester 2015[^38], and the Isnad Institute[^39], established in Birmingham, 2016, are both under the patronage of Shaykh Muhammad Al Yaqoubi, who is a member of the Shadhili *tariqa*. GH engage the youth by helping them acquire spiritual and religious knowledge, participate in sporting activities, and partake in community development. They are active online, with a professional website, and social media accounts, with a following of over eleven thousand people on Facebook, and over four thousand on

[^38]: Initially began their work under ‘Al Huda Courses’ and transitioned into ‘Guidance Hub’ in 2017.
[^39]: [https://www.isnad.org.uk](https://www.isnad.org.uk) (last accessed 02/04/2018). Isnad is not a charity but they focus on disseminating traditional Islamic knowledge through teachers with a chain of transmission leading back to the Prophet.
Instagram. They encourage membership, with a monthly fee of ten pounds. In return, they offer discounts through local business sponsorships on associated services, including restaurants and cultural clothing.

4.4.2 Greensville Trust

Greensville Trust is also a registered charity, founded in Liverpool in 2006, by Shaykh Ibrahim Osi Efa. The Shaykh has studied under prominent Sufi shaykhs such as Shaykh Murabit al-Hajj, Shaykh Habib Umar and Shaykh Habib Kazim al-Saqqaf. The primary aims of Greensville Trust are to provide services for British Muslims to engage with the Islamic sciences. They do this by employing qualified teachers, delivering administrative and financial support for people to attain religious knowledge, and developing learning materials in the English language. Sufism is promoted through the group’s mission to engage people in the Islamic sciences, remembrance of God and uphold the Prophetic example.

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40 As of March 2020.
“...[We] nurture holistic faith-based communities that have at their heart educational institutions that impart a broad and relevant traditional Islamic curriculum. This vision is underpinned by the principles of sincerity, excellence and education rooted in practice; binding formal learning to the imperative of action and seeing education as a transformative process and not merely informative...Sacred education is a God given right of each person that begins prior to birth. Our mission is to deliver this inalienable right thereby facilitating our ultimate purpose, to know God.”

The organisation actively engages the youth through their programme on ‘Futuwwa’ and ‘Futuwwa Retreat’, also referred to as ethical and moral training. They explain the purpose of this on their website:

“Futuwwa is often translated to chivalry but it carries far-reaching significations than the translation’s literal import. This concept encapsulates the essence of the physical and metaphysical path traversed by all of the prophets. Futuwwa is about inculcating self-discipline and character refinement in alignment with a higher, divine-centred purpose. It also highlights and teaches the aspirant the art of balancing and tempering the human faculties of desire, intellect and anger such that the noble virtues of character are unearthed.”

Alongside hosting lectures and events, Greensville run a ‘Micro-Madrasa’ programme, blending classroom and online learning through the Internet:

“Micro-Madrasa is a school of Islamic literacy that endeavours to impart orthodox and holistic teachings at a rudimentary level...E-learning will facilitate a blended learning approach to classroom teaching through an effective usage of the internet in order to provide additional online educational support...[Through] online educational packs and videoconferencing teaching sessions [are] delivered by local, national and international Islamic scholars and teachers of repute.”

41 Greensville Trust found at http://www.greensvilletrust.org/ <last accessed 13/01/2018>.
Greensville Trust have a website and a private Facebook group, however there are no public social media pages. Their website has links to the micro-madrassa programme but does not seem to be updated with information on recent or upcoming events. A separate social media page has been created for the Futuwwa Retreat, which has over six thousand followers.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{44} As of March 2020.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{greensville信托网站.jpg}
\caption{Greensville Trust website (Source: Website).}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{futuwwa脸书群组.jpg}
\caption{Futuwwa Facebook group (Source: Facebook).}
\end{figure}
4.4.3 Rumi’s Cave (RC)

Rumi’s Cave is based in Kilburn, North London, and is a community hub for local residents. RC was founded by Shaykh Ahmed Babikir, a Sudanese Sufi shaykh belonging to the Sammaniya Order, to provide charitable services to local communities in North London. The Shaykh initially founded Ulfa Aid in 2004 for global charity work, before creating RC in 2011 to provide charitable services for local British communities. RC serves as a charity organisation, with aims of serving and supporting vulnerable adults. Although the events at RC are charitable in nature, by running free activities, actively engaging local communities and promoting sacred learning, their two main sister bodies are: Rumi’s Kitchen and Rumi’s Care. The former consists of a weekly soup kitchen for the homeless and vulnerable, providing freshly cooked food for over a hundred people. The latter is a service providing care for the elderly, through hospital visits and a well-being café. They have a website and are also active on social media. RC has over ten thousand followers on Facebook and they are active on Instagram with over eight thousand followers.46

“[Rumis’ Cave] is a non-defined social space open to all to reflect and share...The Cave offers an eclectic mix of programs and events, ranging from poetry, storytelling and music nights, to afternoon tea, and a variety of talks, courses and creative workshops. Rooted in a vibrant and dynamic community, the Cave has managed to bring together a diverse group of local and international guests, who share a passion for culture, creativity and learning. It also serves as a safe, non-judgemental space, where people from different backgrounds can come together and explore their cultures and identity.”47

46 As of March 2020.
47 Rumis Cave found at https://www.rumis.org/cave <last accessed 14/02/2018>.
4.4.4 Greengate Trust

Founded in 2012, Greengate Trust is a charity organisation and madrasa based in Oldham. Prior to this, it only functioned as a mosque. It is led by a young Qari, Muhammad Bilal, who is the principal and Imam. Although it is Barelvi-Sufi affiliated their objective is to be inclusive of all sects and communities.

“[We are] not a political, cultural or traditionally inclined organisation but an organisation that strives to look after ALL Muslims/non-Muslims and to help bring guidance to those who lack it, yet strive for it.”

The organisers are determined to support the British Muslim youth, therefore they host many activities and social gatherings to engage this demographic, such as sporting events, daff drum lessons, and screening boxing fights. One portion of the building is used as a mosque and there

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48 Found at https://www.rumis.org/ <last accessed 12/03/2019>
49 Greengate Trust, ‘Our Mission and Aims’ found at https://www.greengatetrust.com/ <last accessed 14/02/2018>
is a designated area for the youth zone and public hall. Greengate Trust have also launched Learn+, available for any UK madrassa. It is aimed to create a “personalised online learning environment” which provides students and their parents access to all their course materials, exams, exam results, details of upcoming events and so on. This is available on their website. They have over five thousand followers on their Facebook page.

4.4.5 Bahja Initiative

Bahja Initiative was set up in Accrington, Blackburn, in 2013. The organisation was established by students of Shaykh Haroon Hanif and Shaykh Ibrahim Osi Efa. This group engages in charitable giving through soup kitchens, a weekly Curry Club and supplying food parcels to vulnerable communities. They also host youth activities, such as Sunnah Sports, including archery, swimming, wrestling and horse riding, and provide educational courses covering topics such as, Islamic creed (aqida), perfection of worship (ihsan), Qur’an recitation (tajweed) and the Prophetic Biography (seerah). They liaise with local Barelvi-affiliated mosques to host

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50 Greengate Trust, ‘Learn+’ found at https://www.greengatetrust.com/ <last accessed 14/02/2018>
51 As of March 2020.
53 The data in this section was supplemented with an informal telephone interview with a volunteer at Bahja who was my acquaintance, March 2018.
mawlid events and collaborate with people from other Sufi-inspired organisations. Bahja have a modest social media following on Facebook of just over six hundred people, and seven hundred on Instagram.\textsuperscript{54}

![YouTube Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33JVq_fZVXA) <last accessed 07/04/2018>.  

\textbf{Figure 9: Qari Muhammad Bilal founder of the Greengate Trust at the 4th Annual Grand Mawlid hosted by Bahja Initiative (Source: YouTube).}

4.4.6 Madina Institute (MI)\textsuperscript{56}

The Madina Institute is a non-profit, international educational institute with several branches worldwide. Their aim is to,

“Represent a 21st Century Model of what a Masjid should be, attempting to imitate the footsteps of the initial Masjid in Madinah which was built by the Prophet Muhammad, a centre of love, warmth, openness and excellence, that brings communities together, offering facilities that cater for the "academic, social and spiritual" needs of the Community.”\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{54} As of March 2020.

\textsuperscript{55} Found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33JVq_fZVXA <last accessed 07/04/2018>.

\textsuperscript{56} The data in this section was supplemented with an informal telephone interview with an attendee at MI who was a colleague of mine, March 2018.

\textsuperscript{57} see Madina Institute And Masjid Community Hub Oldham on Facebook, ‘About Us’ https://www.facebook.com/pg/MadinaInstituteAndMasjidCommunityHub/about/ <last accessed 10/03/2018>.

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They train their followers in religion and social action. According to their website and social media pages, they offer one-day and weekend seminars to appeal to the youth and lengthier long-term courses for those with less commitments.

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Yahya Ninowy is the founding director of ‘Madina Institute & Seminary’ and ‘Planet Mercy’ in the UK and belongs to the Shadhili, Rifaa'I, Qadiri tariqas. Planet Mercy is a registered charity and non-profit organisation, founded in 2008, with projects in Oldham, Rochdale and Bradford. They run family fun days and workshops for local communities, as well as monthly dinners and entertainment programmes to help build community cohesion. MI also collaborate with the Oldham Baptist Church, Big Issue, British Red Cross and many other local groups.

The events at MI and Planet Mercy are largely attended by young people and professionals, some of whom are not mureeds of the Shaykh. Classes on the principles of religion (usul al-din) and dhikr gatherings bring together Muslims wanting to learn more about the tenets of Islam and followers of other tariqas. Similar to the organisations listed earlier, Sufism is promoted through religious learning and the Prophetic Sunnah. Although there are now several MI branches in the UK, the organisation in Oldham is their centralised base, as specified by the Shaykh himself. Its foundation was enabled by the Shaykh’s student, Hafiz Arshad Mahmood. Planet Mercy supports the civic engagement promoted by MI, through weekly soup kitchens, and a ‘youth-zone’ at the institute allows for social activities and youth engagement. Their websites enable charitable donations and marketing for events. There are four different Facebook pages for the MI branches in the UK and one page for Planet Mercy. Collectively, they have over eight thousand followers.58

58 As of March 2020.
Minhaj-ul-Quran (‘The Way of the Qur’an’) is an International Sufi organisation, with its main headquarters in Lahore, Pakistan. Dr. Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri an Islamic jurist and Sufi-Barelvi scholar, established MQI in October 1980. Many of his followers consider him an Islamic revivalist and ascribe him the title ‘Shaykh-ul-Islam’. His website claims he has authored around 1000 books, “out of which 400 books are already published, and the rest of them are yet to be published...[and] he has delivered over 5000 lectures (in Urdu, English and Arabic).”

In the UK, Dr. Qadri has been frequently invited to the Global Peace and Unity (GPU) event, where he has broadcast his fatwa denouncing terrorism. The GPU was inaugurated in 2005, as an annual two-day conference in London, hosted by the Islam Channel. It was both an interfaith and multicultural event which invited guest speakers and


celebrity *nasheed* artists. They would also display an Islamic exhibition and hold seminars and workshops on a range of topics pertaining to religion.

![Figure 11: YouTube video of Dr. Tahir-ul-Qadri addressing GPU attendees (2013) and live viewers on Islam Channel (Source: YouTube).](image)

Membership to the MQI is attained by completing a form, along with prescribed membership fees. This is either posted to MQI headquarters or submitted at a local branch. Minhaj-ul-Quran International UK (MQI UK) is registered with the charity commission. The UK site exclusively states the MQI UK objectives are to work in the fields of education and spirituality, as well as promote social-welfare, interfaith and inter-cultural harmony and global peace (Morgahi 2014). They claim to have fifty-five branches in different parts of Britain, including Scotland, the North and South of England and the Midlands. However, not all of these branches will have a physical premises. There may be a significant number of members in an area who will gather within local homes and masjids in the absence of an MQI UK building. MQI are associated with approximately seventy-six different websites and six social media pages which have been created by members.

His close *mureed*, Milad Raza Qadri, is a popular young British *naat khwaan* from Scotland and has dedicated at least three songs as a tribute to Dr. Tahir-ul-Qadri: ‘Saqi’ (wine-bearer or cup bearer)\(^{62}\), ‘Mere Tahir Piya’ (My Beloved Tahir) and ‘Bharay Jahan Mein Tujh Sa Na

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\(^{62}\) The metaphor of ‘Wine’ is often used in Sufi poetry and *qawwals* to define spiritual intoxication.
Rehbar Daikha’ (In this huge world I have not found a leader like you). These videos have gathered over four-hundred thousand views on YouTube.\textsuperscript{63}

![YouTube Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXGA1__x98o)

*Figure 12: Album Cover, of ‘Mere Tahir Piya’, a tribute to Shaykh Tahir-ul-Qadri (Source: YouTube).* 64

### 4.5 Offline-Online Youth-led Barelvi organisations

The UK Mosque Statistics Report (2017) show there is a dominant South Asian influence within mosque management totalling up to 86 per cent, and most of these favour the elderly generation, who set up most of the mosque committees to preserve the culture of their home-country and to deliver a religious service.\textsuperscript{65} Many young Muslims in the UK have felt alienated because the mosques have been unable to meet their needs and or retain their interests.\textsuperscript{66} There has been a low growth of Barelvi-oriented masjids in comparison to the overall rate, as the newer Barelvi organisations have begun to establish themselves as community institutions, as opposed to mosques.\textsuperscript{67} Although they are considered ‘Ahl as-Sunnah’ by many, the groups’ traditions and practice have strong undercurrents of South-

\textsuperscript{63} As of March 2020.
\textsuperscript{64} Full naat video found at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXGA1__x98o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXGA1__x98o) <last accessed 07/04/2018>.
\textsuperscript{65} Mehmood Naqshbandi. ‘UK Mosque Statistics / Masjid Statistics’ (16 Sep 2017) found at [http://www.muslimsinbritain.org/resources/masjid_report.pdf](http://www.muslimsinbritain.org/resources/masjid_report.pdf) <last accessed 26/02/2018>
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
Asian influence and can therefore be better recognised as predominantly ‘Barelvi’ organisations.

4.5.1 Kanz ul Huda

Kanz ul Huda was founded in Birmingham in 2003, by Pir Saqib Shaami. It is a tariqa-based organisation with a strong international presence, which confirms how Sufi practices are now being exported from the UK to other parts of the world. Kanz ul Huda’s mission is to propagate Sufi teachings through Islamic knowledge (‘ilm), implementation of knowledge (amal), service to creation (khidmatul khalq), sincerity (ikhlaas) and Islamic missionary work (da’wah) to achieve the love (mahabbah) and spiritual proximity (ma’rifah) to God and His Prophet. The Pir is Barelvi-Sufi affiliated with the Chishti tariqa, which is reflected in the teachings provided at the centre. In Birmingham, gatherings are held weekly, on a Friday, and these have largely attracted young British-Pakistani Muslims. After the recitation of naats, the Shaykh delivers an English sermon (with occasional rapturous Urdu and Punjabi references) and then leads the dhikr. He concludes with prayer (dua) and calls for new attendees to pledge bay’ah. Although the group is largely tariqa-based, members from other tariqas can be found attending the weekly gatherings. Kanz ul Huda UK also run a Qur’an Academy for the youth. They have options to register online through their website and join their WhatsApp group. Kanz ul Huda have over twenty-two thousand followers on Facebook and Pir Saqib Shaami holds a following of over 3.7 million.

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68 The data in this section was supplemented with an informal telephone interview with a family member who was a member of Kanz ul Huda, March 2018.
70 This data was last noted in 2018, the pirs Facebook page has since been removed.
4.5.2 Youthway/Al-Hikam Institute

Youthway was established in 2011 by Imam Asim Hussain when he was just twenty years old, as a series of lectures on issues relevant to British Muslim youth in the throes of cultural and religious identity crises. Now based in Bradford, this charity continues to address the needs of young Muslims across the country by organising retreats, seminars, workshops, and lectures. Asim Hussain was a Barelvi scholar striving to engage youth in their personal and religious development. To specifically address the educational requirements of this demographic, he formed the Al-Hikam Institute in 2015, to provide more comprehensive Islamic teaching. The centre also hosts a youth club and encourages attendees to participate in charitable endeavours, such as feeding the homeless and cleaning graveyards. Imam Asim holds a personal social media following of over one hundred and ninety-four thousand. Al-Hikam’s Facebook page has nearly three thousand followers. Al-Hikam is managed through the Youthway website and their events are advertised, and occasionally livestreamed, on Facebook.

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71 This data was last noted in 2018, the pirs Facebook page has since been removed.
72 Due to a controversy in 2019, Asim Hussain has since been removed of his title ‘Imam’.
73 This data was collected in 2018. On denouncing his title ‘Imam’, this page has subsequently been removed.
4.6 Offline-Online: Sufism on University Campuses

Contemporary Sufi expression is polyvalent. A number of Sufi-inspired initiatives have been created by young British Muslims in higher education which allow female participation and encourage women to become more involved in positions of leadership, such as planning activities and liaising with religious actors. Below are some examples of how young Muslims are taking responsibility of transmitting Sufism by creating alternative religious spaces.

4.6.1 The Madinah Societies

I was a student at the University of Manchester when Madinah Society was first established in 2013. Some of the founders were on my BA (Hons) Religion and Theology programme cohort. Manchester University’s Madinah Society was initially created in response to the Islamic Society’s (ISOC) teachings and influence across British universities. The founders of the Madinah Society believed the ISOCs had a strong Wahhabi/Salafi inclination. As the ISOC committees are inclined to a particular religious leaning, members are also predisposed to a

Figure 14: Founder of Al-Hikam Institute, Imam Asim Hussain’s public Facebook page (Source: Facebook).

certain type of religious interpretation (Inge 2016). These students wanted to create a society which the Ahl as-Sunnah could participate in, and allow the youth to comfortably connect with Sufi traditions, through *dhikr* gatherings and commemoration of the birth of the Prophet (*Mawlid un-Nabi*). However, they were condemned by the ISOC for being deliberately divisive, and did not understand the appetite for creating a ‘separate’ society for Muslim students.

Madinah Society claim they are not solely a religious society, but exist to be inclusive of all those of faith and no faith backgrounds, to provide free events, educational and welfare services, promote “values of love, tolerance and peace embedded in traditional Islam” and represent “the spiritual, inner dimension of Islamic worship...for the benefit and education of the wider community.” Madinah Society is now a national organisation, as there are nine societies across British universities. Their expansion led to the creation of ‘The Madinah Society Network’, which was formally set up on 12 Rabi ul Awwal 1437 AH (24th December 2015). This date is significant as it marks the birth date of the Prophet Muhammad. The Network serves as an umbrella body for all the Madinah Societies across the UK, to support their development on campus, by sharing knowledge and expertise on accessing resources, funding and training, as well as organising events.

Although I was not enrolled onto the doctoral programme at the time, and therefore do not possess any fieldnotes, I have a strong recollection of my experience with Manchester Madinah Society because of the influence of the group amongst young Muslims on campus. Many of the early choice of events and invited speakers were informed by the committee members’ religious interests, including their individual association to different *tariqas*.

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75 ‘History of the Madinah Society Network’, *found at* [http://www.madinahsocietynetwork.com/history/](http://www.madinahsocietynetwork.com/history/) *(last accessed 02/02/2018)*.

76 This is anecdotal data during my time at Manchester University from 2013-14.

77 *ibid.*

78 Madinah Society of the University of Manchester, ‘Description’ *found at* [https://manchesterstudentsunion.com/groups/madinah-society-of-the-university-of-manchester](https://manchesterstudentsunion.com/groups/madinah-society-of-the-university-of-manchester) *(last accessed 01/02/2018)*

79 ‘History of the Madinah Society Network’.

80 ‘About the Madinah Society Network’ *found at* [http://www.madinahsocietynetwork.com/about/](http://www.madinahsocietynetwork.com/about/) *(last accessed 02/02/2018)*.
However, when events were held at the University, lecture rooms could very easily be transformed into spaces for *mehfils*. The audience members were comprised of followers from different *tariqas*, listening to, and following the practices of the *shaykhs* who were invited. One example of this is when Shaykh Hisham Kabbani of the Naqshbandi-Haqqani Order was invited to Manchester University in September 2014, shortly after the passing of Mehmet Nazim Adil (better known as Shaykh Nazim Haqqani). The event was co-hosted by Manchester and Salford University Madinah Society’s and brought together students, but also families and professionals.

However, some of the actions that took place could almost be considered unusual for a university event because of the spiritual environment that was generated. The lecture theatre was filled with echoes of “Takbir, Allahu Akbar” and “Naara-e-Risaalat, Ya RasoolAllah”, as well as “jeevay, jeevay, Murshid jeevay”. *Naats* were recited in Punjabi, although the reciters themselves were not of a Pakistani background. Part way through the *naat* recitation, audience members, both men and women, stood in front of the desks in the lecture theatre and rocked back and forth, as they would normally do in a *hadra* trance. The audience also joined in with a collective *dhikr*, in which they shouted and professed Shaykh Nazim as the Sultan of the friends of God (Awliya Allah). Not every attendee or committee member of the society held a formal allegiance to Shaykh Nazim’s Naqshbandi-Haqqani *tariqa*, yet the audience collectively showed respect for a Shaykh who was revered amongst the Ahl as-Sunnah.

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81 Despite the *tariqa* being established by a Turkish-Cypriot, their tours to the UK and English speeches have appealed to young British Muslims, many of whom are of a Pakistani background.

82 Slogans used to callout “God is the Greatest” and “Oh Messenger of Allah”.

83 Punjabi slogan which can be translated as “live [long], live [long], the spiritual guide live [long]”.

84 A collective supererogatory ritual performed in some Sufi Orders, where audiences stand, rocking back and forth during the *dhikr*.
Despite their efforts, the Madinah Society have been criticised by students who are Ahl as-Sunnah orientated. They believe the society is not representative of all Ahl as-Sunnah groups and has too much of a South-Asian (mostly Pakistani) influence, therefore it should be considered a ‘Barelvi’ society. However, opinions towards the society fluctuate with the election of new committee members each year. I felt these initial sentiments were understandable due to the strong influence of South Asian cultural practices and believed the society should have done more to involve students of diverse backgrounds.

Although the Madinah Societies mostly operate on campus, their collective website, ‘Madinah Society Network’ provides useful information on how to create a branch of Madinah society within a university, events information, press releases and job vacancies. Individual Madinah Societies also have their own social media pages, unique to their university. This allows students to stay up-to-date with the events held on campus.

4.6.2 Islamic Theology Society (ITS)

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85 This event was recorded and uploaded on YouTube by Salford Madinah Society, found at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y53L78Kekal <last accessed 07/04/2018>.
86 This is anecdotal data during my time at Manchester University from 2013-16.
87 The data in this section was supplemented with an informal telephone interview with the current treasurer of the society who was my acquaintance, March 2018.
The Islamic Theology Society (ITS) was established in 2011. Like the Madinah Societies, their objective is to be an umbrella society for all those who belong to the Ahl as-Sunnah. ITS is currently managed at Bradford University and is the first, and only, society of its kind in the UK. The aim of the society is to disseminate the teachings of mainstream Sunni Islam, through regular classes and events. They have proudly hosted many international scholars and personalities for events and classes, such as Shaykh Habib Ali al-Jifri, Shaykh Ahmed Saad al-Azhari, Shaykh Bahauddin Adil Haqqani, Shaykh Faisal Hamid Abdur-Razak and Owais Raza Qadri (*naat khwaan*), as well as UK-based scholars including, Imam Khalid Hussein, Imam Muhammad Asim Hussain, Shaykh Mohammed Aslam and Shaykha Nosheen Gul. Certain international scholars have also requested the Society to arrange an audience for them to speak at Bradford, because of its dense Muslim population. Prior to the ITS society, ‘Madni Society’ was quite popular amongst students at Bradford university. This was a *tariqa*-based society which was ran by followers of Shaykh Muhammad Ilyas Qadri, founder of Dawat-e-Islami, a Sufi-affiliated Barelvi movement. Madni Society is currently inactive.

When speaking to the current treasurer of the society, I was informed that although the founders of ITS belonged to different *tariqas*, they all had the same *aqida*, which united them in their work to create this student body. The ITS aim to focus on global Ahl as-Sunnah scholarship, rather than limiting themselves to the teachings of Imam Ahmad Raza Khan, though they claim to be inclusive of everyone, despite their religious background or ethnicity. Like Madinah Society, when ITS was initially founded they conflicted with the ISOC, who were sceptical towards certain Sufi-inclined beliefs and practices, although this relation has since improved.

The ITS tenaciously promote Sufism, both implicitly (through teachings, *da’wah* work and social gatherings), and explicitly (by promoting *dhikr* gatherings at Bradford Grand Mosque, Al-Jamia Suffa-Tul-Islam, hosting *mawlid* and *qawwali* nights, and *ziyara*, allowing people to visit the cloth that is believed to be part of the Prophet’s holy grave and strands from his hair).

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88 See ‘UBU Islamic Theology Society’ found at [https://www.facebook.com/UBUITS/](https://www.facebook.com/UBUITS/) and [https://www.bradfordunisu.co.uk/groups/islamic-theology-society-its](https://www.bradfordunisu.co.uk/groups/islamic-theology-society-its) <last accessed 30/01/2018>

89 Informal telephone interview in February 2018.
Although ITS do not have a website, they are active on Facebook with nearly four thousand followers where users are updated with information on upcoming events.90

4.7 Online

This section refers to Sufi expression that was initiated on social media. Users will engage with these groups virtually, although some gatherings may be held in a physical space - this begins online and is then translated offline.

4.7.1. Youth naat khwaani91

As discussed in Chapter Two, the recitation naat is considered a sacred practice. The title ‘naat khwaan’ is given to those who recite naats melodiously and are regularly invited to mehfils specifically for this purpose. A naat khwaan may also recite Sufi mystical poetry (kalaams), praises of God (hamd) and praises of revered Sufi saints and other religious figures (manqabat).

It is difficult to trace the early history of youth naat khwaani in Britain. This is because most of the early mehfils were private and undocumented, and largely held within mosques and homes as part of a South-Asian religious tradition. Over the last six years, the online presence of youth naat khwaani has dramatically increased on social media. Reciters now create professionally produced naat content, as well as substandard online videos and vlogs, in which they recite Sufi poetry and complex raags92 in their original languages. Through social media appearances, largely on Facebook and YouTube, young naat khwaans have received national and international exposure, creating a ‘celebrity’ culture. This popularity has resulted in the formation of British naat organisations, such as the National Youth Naat Association (NYNA) in 2016 and Youth Quran Naat Council (YQNC) in 2015, to promote young reciters, and occasionally livestream their events.

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90 Data collected in Feb 2018.
91 The data in this section was supplemented with a visit for informal interviews with some youth naat khwaan during the Open Call event in Oldham, July 2017.
92 An improvised melodic frame.
Young British naat khawaans have been influenced by international reciters, who travelled from Pakistan to the UK to recite in mehfils and debut on radio and television. In interviews on ‘Nasheeds Unplugged’, on Ummah Channel, some youth naat reciters have described how their parents encouraged them to recite within gatherings, as young as five or six years of age. Despite their apprehension, it was their enthusiasm for naat khwaani that would allow them to perform in front of large crowds.

Naat recitation can be considered a way of maintaining loyalty to ‘Barelvi traditions’ by some ulama. The ‘Sunni Foundation’ have since hosted an annual ‘English Sunni Conference’ where English-speaking imams and youth naat khawaans are invited to inspire a young demographic to uphold their beliefs and traditions, and equip them with the skills to defend their aqida. This is usually under the guidance and supervision of a Sufi shaykh.

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93 This information was accessed on an online interview via Nasheeds Unplugged (recorded on Ummah Channel), where three young naat khawaans share insights into their early performances, 14 March 2016 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CXWhOmEtZLo <last accessed 17/09/2018>.


95 This is a charity based in Bradford.
As an example, the ‘Second Annual English Sunni Conference’ in January 2017 covered topics such as, ‘What is Ahlus Sunnah’, ‘What is Maslak-e-Ala Hazrat’, ‘Behaviours and Etiquettes of a Sunni’, ‘How to Deal with Differences’, as well as issues surrounding Islamophobia and hate crime in Britain. These topics relate to the challenges faced by young British Muslims and gives them a platform to not only seek advice on what it means to be a Muslim in Britain, but how to remain, and defend, their position as a member of the Ahl as-Sunnah community.

![Official poster of the Second Annual 'English Sunni Conference', featuring Pirs, Shaykhs, Imams and youth naat khwaans (Source: Facebook).]

4.7.2 Rumi’s Circle

96 Much of the data in this section was supplemented with an informal telephone interview with one of the founders, who was also my acquaintance, March 2018.
Rumi’s Circle was created in 2013 and exists only on social media. They have accumulated nearly three thousand followers on Facebook. The group emerged out of the Threshold Society, an organisation for Mevlevi Sufis. As the founders are all members of the Threshold Society they refer to Rumi’s Circle as a sister organisation. The four founders themselves are all Muslim, Mevlevi Sufis. They consider Rumi’s Circle inspired by Sufism, but not a Sufi organisation.\(^{97}\) The process of becoming an organisation was organic and not strategic. It grew out of inspiration and other people’s engagement with the different types of events that were held by the founders. They take inspiration from the legacy of Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273) and the events try to stay grounded in the Islamic tradition. The organisation is not a ‘Universal Sufi’ group as they try to stay within some alignment to sharia and tariqa. However, they hold a perennial view of Islam, and believe the religion is open to non-Muslims, who can engage with the Islamic practice.

Rumi’s Circle aim to bring people together from different faiths and backgrounds, instead of promoting Sufi outreach. I was informed by the co-founder\(^ {98}\) that their focus is not on da‘wah, rather it is on adab, which they define as appropriate behaviour, driven by the heart as opposed to just ‘respect’, and khidma, to be truly welcoming, through service to others. They currently operate as a non-profit organisation, but are looking to obtain charitable status. They have no building or physical premises and are not looking to acquire this space. When asked why, I was informed management will become expensive and they do not want to feel attached or bound to any particular place. Their meeting places “have to be beautiful, not corporate, such as old churches...‘pretty spaces’”.\(^ {99}\)

Rumi’s Circle hold different types of events. They try and incorporate practices from the Mevlevi order as a tool for spiritual growth. Their first gatherings began with Turkish devotional poetry, and over time they added whirling and music from different faith traditions. They also hold an urs celebration to commemorate Jalaluddin Rumi. The dhikhr

\(^{97}\) This was shared during the informal telephone interview, March 2018.
\(^{98}\) During a telephone meeting March 2018.
\(^{99}\) During a telephone meeting March 2018.
gatherings contain various Islamic chants such as ‘Allah’ and ‘Hu’ and they end with the traditional Mevlevi prayer.

Most events have an element of Islamic practice or tradition, but the group have a pluralistic reading of Islam and see Islam as inclusive in nature. They claim they are not trying to be purposely inauthentic, but they want to do what is ‘beautiful’ as “beauty is a root to people’s heart.”100 The audiences are from diverse and intergenerational backgrounds and attendees vary across different events that are advertised across the founders’ personal networks and social media followers. The Mevlevi dhikr gatherings are attended by both non-Muslims and non-Sufis. They claim to encourage people to write for their online blog on their experiences of integrating spirituality in their daily lives.

4.7.3. ‘Sufi shopping’

Social media pages and websites can become a marketplace for users to acquire Sufi paraphernalia. Online retail brands with a Sufi impetus allow consumers to form a Sufi appearance through clothing and accessories. Barakah Base is a popular site that users can access on Facebook. Although their shop is located in Bolton, most of their engagement is found online (approximately five thousand followers on their personal user account and over two thousand on their public page).101

Their range Sufi paraphernalia includes, ‘Yemeni shawls’ advertised to “revive a Sunnah”, “‘MiniMevleviHats’: Merchandise from Konya, in commemoration of the urs (death anniversary) of Mevlana Jalāl-al-dīn Rūmī”, “‘The Na’al Sibha’102: a unique example of traditional tasbih craftsmanship” and “‘Sa'diyah Journal’: ...worthy as a gift to your Shaykh, a loved one, or to write a memoir and reminisce your own precious moments on the journey to the Divine.”103 Much of the merchandise is sold and advertised through social media, where administrators also share Sufi events, advice and lessons from Sufi guides.

100 Telephone meeting March 2018.
101 As of March 2020.
102 Said to be in the shape form of the Prophet’s sandal.
Figure 18: ‘Mini Mevlevi Deco Hats’ available for purchase, ‘BarakahBase’ (Source: Facebook).

Figure 19: Facebook post by BarakahBase sharing some history and a quote by Shaykh Muhammad Baha’uddin Shah Naqshband, founder of the Naqshbandi tariqa (Source: Facebook).

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Sufi Marriage Directory UK is a free ‘matchmaking service’ for those of Sufi orientation. The service appears to have been created as a response to the pressures and difficulties young Muslims encounter when looking for a suitable, prospective spouse (see Ahmad 2017). The application gives the option for those looking to get married to contact a compatible person, either directly, or through their chosen guardian/representative. Each applicant is advised to post their profile, also known as a ‘marriage CV’. This provides a basic summary of their personality, religious leanings, lifestyle, interests and even looks(!). Once the profile is sent to the administrator it is posted on the group. The person can then be contacted to express interest or for further information.

The service is advertised as: “Marriage seekers profiles. Lovers of Milad, Mawlid, Wasilah, Khatams, Awliyah. Only for those in UK.” The following instructions are given by the service administrator:

“1. Download the telegram app from the app store or google play store.
2. Click the link to JOIN and view profiles. [https://t.me/joinchat/AAAAAEpyLDkJDjIYq2wr](https://t.me/joinchat/AAAAAEpyLDkJDjIYq2wr)
3. EMAIL to post your profile sufimarriedirectoryuk@gmail.com.

PROFILE TEMPLATE:
Gender, Age, Location, Ethnicity, Height, Build, Beard, Hijab/niqab, Nationality e.g. British born, Education, Employment, Marital status (any children), Polygamy, Revert (Optional), Tariqa/Shaykh, Madhab e.g. hanafi, shafi. A bit about yourself, What you’re looking for inc must haves, preferences, (give as much detail), Contact details: number or email
Personal, or third person (guardian/wali, please state relation)

Smile it’s sunnah and read Salawat

💚

SUFI MARRIAGE DIRECTORY UK
ADMIN.”
The service operates ‘online’ and the group is managed on the ‘Telegram’ application, which is used for social networking. Anyone can join the group, provided they have downloaded the application on their phones. Once a profile is published it is visible for all group members, regardless of whether they have uploaded their own information.

4.8 Conclusion

In summary, by observing new and emerging forms of Sufi expression from a theoretical lens of ‘everyday religion’, I have provided insights into emblematic Sufi practices that have helped to conceptualise Sufism more broadly, beyond the rigid sociological categories found in earlier studies. The expansion of Geaves’ (2000) earlier typology is tentative and this exploratory conceptualisation will be better understood through a more in-depth analysis of some of these field sites. Having explored the prevalent existing trends in Sufi expression, it
is evident that many Islamic spiritual activities are now transitioning to an online platform. In order to answer my research questions, and having identified where there is a significant gap in the literature in Chapter Two, I have used this mapping exercise to select my four field sites. I choose two offline sites (Rumi’s Cave and Guidance Hub) and two online sites (youth *naat khwaani* and Sufi Shopping via Barakah Base) as inductive examples of post-*tariqa* Sufism.

I draw on my hypothesis and the working definitions of post-*tariqa* Sufism (see Hermansen 2012; Sedgwick 2016) as conceptual tools to analyse my findings and help generate a more comprehensive definition. The criteria on this selection process was also informed by some of the hallmarks of post-*tariqa* Sufism (see Section 2.3.2). I chose the offline sites as two of the biggest offline Sufi-inspired charity organisations, where the role of the *shaykhs* are more obscure. These centres appear to differ from the structural modes found in Sufi orders; where the attendees are usually initiated into the *tariqa* and pledge allegiance in order to seek guidance from the *shaykh*. Moreover, by selecting field sites in two different regions of England, I will also be able to make a prefatory judgement on the ‘North-South’ divide in religious expression. Similarly, the online sites have not been considered in depth in any previous study (see Chapter Two) and will help convey how Britain’s consumer landscape impacts religious activity and engagement. This will contribute towards an under-researched area on Sufism in Britain and consider the novel ways young Muslims conceptualise these traditions. In the following chapter, I will examine the key features of my field sites through ethnographic and netnographic descriptions. I also observe the multifarious ways Sufi engagement is negotiated and reconstructed in their settings.
Chapter Five – The Production of Sufism

5.0 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter One, in this study Sufism is understood holistically. I take account of the mystical dimensions of traditional Sufi practice, as well as shared values of community, institutions and leadership (Knysh 2017). The latter consists of communal affairs (such as, congregating within Sufi tariqas), which differ from the meditative reflections on God, associated with mysticism (Brekke 2016, p.83). Having mapped contemporary forms of Sufi expression in the preceding chapter, I now move on to discuss my offline and online field sites in greater depth. In this chapter, I analyse the production of Sufi activities and the ways in which they manifest via my case studies of Sufi-inspired charity organisations and social media. I focus on events, devotional music via naat khwaani and commercial Sufi ‘paraphernalia’.

Although the relationship between production and consumption is not linear, nor static, framing my findings through this binary captures the unique nature of ‘supply and demand’ against which the religious and social landscape of contemporary Sufism is embedded. The production of Sufism operates in a ‘religious marketplace’ where faith-based institutions and figures offer different products and packages for the consumer (Iannaccone 1992; Sutcliffe and Bowman 2000) (see Chapter Two). Drawing on the rational choice theory and the market model of religion (Finke and Stark 1992; Finke and Iannaccone 1993), I argue religious producers promote products and services for their audiences to consume, in response to the limited resources of existing Islamic institutions (mosques and Sufi orders), who have struggled to engage different demographics of Muslim communities. In this context, aspects of Sufi culture are commodified to become more relevant, ‘customer oriented’ and ‘entertaining’ (see Gauthier et al. 2013, p.17). I also discuss how traditional tariqas and Sufi brotherhoods have been partially substituted for new spiritual communities.

This raises questions as to why new Sufi activities have come to exist and to what extent this development is impacted by the surrounding social milieu in Britain? Thus, the nuances of Sufi practice, as observed in my research, are explored through the prism of ‘post-tariqa
Sufism’, currently defined in the literature as a movement that emphasises collective Sufi practices without initiation and individual spiritual training (Hermansen 2012, p.257). As discussed in Chapters Two and Four, I use this as a conceptual lens to analyse Sufi expression in these new spaces, as currently no elaborate definition exists. I explore the hallmarks and create a working definition of ‘post-tariqa’. The ethnographic material in this chapter is significant as modern Sufi institutions in Britain, outside of tariqa, are under-researched and studies on contemporary lived Sufi practice have been limited (Bennett and Ramsey 2012).

I begin by providing thorough ethnographic descriptions of my two offline fieldwork sites, before moving onto to convey and analyse my online netnographic work, on youth naat khwaani and the sale of Sufi paraphernalia by Barakah Base. This will answer my first research question on the current forms of Sufi expression. I analyse Rumi’s Cave and Guidance Hub, using ‘thick description’ (see Geertz 1973), evaluating how these spaces are used, and how the organisations promote Sufism via their charity status. As discussed in Chapter Three, Section 3.4, these descriptive methods are necessary as they help uncover the ways in which Sufi expression has departed from traditional modes of congregation in the tariqas and reveal the new spaces in which Sufism manifests.

5.1 Rumi’s Cave (RC) and Guidance Hub (GH): Versatile spaces

‘Rumi’s Cave’ (RC, also referred to a ‘Rumis’ by participants) is modelled after the legacy of Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273), a renowned Sufi mystic who is celebrated amongst Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Inspired by Rumi’s teachings, the organisers intend to use the space to revive his message of universal love and service to communities. RC can be best described as a community hub and spiritual centre, although it can also be considered a charity organisation, an academic and creative space, and a place of worship. When you enter the building, you are expected to take off your shoes and place them on the wooden shelf next to the sign: “please leave your shoes and ego here” (see Figure 23), in recognition of its sacred spaces. There is a small noticeboard and projector signposted with details of upcoming events to make people aware of their services. If pre-registration is required for the event, you are expected to approach, or be approached, by a member of staff to provide your name for the register.
The building mostly has a blue and white theme, with coloured spectrums of aqua and turquoise. This is reflected on the painted walls, carpet and décor. The choice of colour scheme may have been intentional; historically, colours have been significant within Sufi cosmology, which represent aspects of faith (Baker 2004; Eaton 2013). In the central room, most of the carpet is filled by a large oriental rug (see Figure 25). Islamic calligraphy is displayed on the walls in Arabic and Chinese languages, coupled with quotes in English from Mawlana Rumi’s teachings, such as, “your heart is the size of the ocean go find yourself in its hidden depths,” conveying the cultural diversity of the centre.

*Figure 21: Notices for upcoming events and poetic quotes on the window outside Rumi’s Cave (Source: Author Photo, 2017).*
Figure 22: Quote by Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi painted on the wall inside RC (Source: Author, 2017).

Figure 23: RC notices with the venue’s WI-FI Internet password (omitted) and my research notice (Source: Author Photo, 2017).
Figure 24: Ladies mawlid event held in the central room at RC (Source: Author Photo, 2017).

Figure 25: Seating arrangements on the floor—large oriental rug and cushions, RC (Source: Author Photo, 2017).
My participants shared their views on the ‘feeling’ or ambiance of the venue, which was informed by their interactions with members of staff and other visitors. There was a shared sentiment of RC seeming homely, relaxing, inclusive and welcoming. This was shaped by the principles of the organisers who aspired for RC to be “open to all” and “family friendly”.

Attendees could be seen passing in and out of the venue, arriving at different times and leaving their coats and jackets around the rooms, just as one may do in the comfort of their own home. One of the managers informed me:

this is a place somewhere between a mosque and a night out. You have to be part of a clique in a mosque, this is more ‘chill’: ‘you can pray here’, as opposed to, ‘this is a place for prayer’...there are multiple benefits for attending events, such as networking, seeking knowledge, social activities, and people can work on their spirituality. There is no pressure, you don’t even have to pray, you’re welcome to just sit (paraphrased, fieldnotes RC 24/11/2017).

Figure 26: Blue theme inside RC, Futon, Arabic Calligraphy writing ‘Allah’ and a rolled-up projector screen (Source: Author Photo, 2017).

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Participants also shared that RC provides a place for spirituality and healing, and how small organisations, like RC, are a space for ‘decolonisation’, as they resist societal conformity. This is because (religious) knowledge is not imposed; rather people are encouraged to educate themselves and help others to do so. They believed RC is a community space to harness creativity which brings people together. It is an important place for artists and for “public expression”. At the end of an event on young Muslims in contemporary societies, one lady spoke to the gathering of the significance of RC in supporting this demographic,

Even when people perform out of tune people clap and support them. People appreciate each other...At Rumis we are a tribe, not sectarian, but we have a shared interest in supporting each other...we need more places like this as geographically it’s hard for people to come here. We know people in Birmingham and Newcastle who have heard of this and travel here once a year or [every] 16 months...my generation have failed the younger generation as we haven’t created alternatives like Rumi’s and younger people and Shaykh Babikir are doing this work and investing in places like Rumi’s (paraphrased, fieldnotes RC 25/11/2017).

RC is a versatile space. The rooms in the venue can be transformed to cater for different activities and events, through changes in décor and furnishing. For example, the room used to host the monthly movie club is the same room for weekly Friday prayers. However, the arrangements for movie club, such as eating popcorn and being seated in front of a large projector screen, caters to the social activity of its kind. The same is not available during congregational prayers, where attendees sit in front of a 

khateeb, to listen to a sermon (khutbah) and engage in worship.

Like RC, Guidance Hub (GH, also referred to as ‘the Hub’) shares features of being a community centre and charity organisation which hosts social, educational and spiritual activities. GH serves all communities, irrespective of their religious backgrounds, although it was primarily created to serve the needs of British Muslims in Greater Manchester. The centre’s patron is Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, a Syrian Sufi guide belonging to the Shadhili tariqa. The organisation is based in Cheetham Hill, Manchester, and operates in a large

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108 The person who delivers the sermon.
community building that consists of: a reception, kitchen, large community room, classes and *tajweed* rooms, staff room, men and women’s toilet and ablution areas and a prayer room. As a relatively new institute, the building floor plan is subject to change as there are construction and renovation works planned to expand and modernise the facilities at the centre. By operating within major cities, participants in both RC and GH found adjacent public transport links a convenient way to access their facilities, which helped maintain easy access and regular visits. Moreover, due to their proximity to local universities and the academic format of some events they attract undergraduate students and educated classes (increasingly common within modern Sufi networks) (Howell 2007).

GH’s building is larger than RC. Multiple rooms offer a greater range of services. The centre provides a car park and a reception area, where guests are greeted by either a member of staff or the receptionist who notes down details for registration and directs visitors to the room wherein the day’s event will be held. In the rooms where courses are typically delivered, there is a classroom setting and layout, with tables, chairs and whiteboards. In the large community hall, this setting and theme is subject to change. During public lectures the room may be filled with desks and chairs, a room partition, as well large interactive screens, much like a university lecture theatre; but during the Burdah night\textsuperscript{109} or *mawlis* there will be a decorated stage, lanterns and large rugs placed over the carpets, and the setting will be similar to that of a mosque.

\footnote{\textsuperscript{109} A monthly female *mawlid* reciting the Qasida Burdah, a Sufi poem by Imam al-Busiri.}
Figure 27: Reception area and welcome desk, Guidance Hub (Source: Author Photo, 2018).

Figure 28: Classroom style layout, whiteboard, chairs and desks at GH (Source: Author Photo, 2018).
Figure 29: Large community room transformed to host the archery class in GH (Source: Author Photo, 2018).

Figure 30: GH community room set up for a public talk in Ramadan with miniature desk trays, room partition separating the genders and large projector screens (Source: Author Photo, 2018).
The organisation began as ‘Al Huda Courses’, and focused on delivering sacred knowledge, teaching traditional Islamic sciences for education (*ta’leem*), moral nurturing (*tarbiya*) and the purification of the heart (*tazkiya*)\textsuperscript{110}. In 2017, they re-branded as ‘Guidance Hub’ and adopted a more outward-facing, community focus, to provide grassroots social, welfare and spiritual support. Prior to launching, the founders consulted with Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi, the spiritual patron of project, who named the project. The trustees consistently engage with the Shaykh, providing him with updates on activities. The Shaykh prays for the betterment of the organisation, as well as sharing his guidance and advice, and ensuring the staff focus more on communal and enjoyable activities, to engage and benefit different communities in Greater Manchester.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{110} This was information shared on the Al-Huda courses’ Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/pg/alhudacourses/about/ <last accessed 24/01/2019>.

\textsuperscript{111} Fieldnotes Guidance Hub, 21/07/2018.
5.2 Leadership

Both institutions can be considered ‘sacred spaces’ because of the presence and association of the shaykh (Gottschalk 2013). By sacred space I refer to a place which holds religious meanings for those who use it (Brie et al. 2009; Thiessen and McAlpine 2013). The two shaykhs serve as the patrons of the organisations, providing guidance to the management team and overseeing planned activities, informing the spiritual, economic and strategic dimensions. Unlike leaders of tariqas, the shaykhs affiliated with these two organisations do not allocate a single deputy to help manage their work with the wider public (Geaves 2000), rather they collaborate with a number of people who share their vision for communal engagement and Sufism more broadly\footnote{Whom may not necessarily follow the same tariqa.}. In comparison to Sufi tariqas (see Werbner 2003), the role of the shaykh is more ‘invisible’ and there are limited opportunities for audiences to be seated in their presence. Daily activities and administration are run by a small team of managers. Volunteers also support the organisation, particularly during social action projects.

As one participant claimed, “You don’t have to be a Sufi to be at Rumi’s”\footnote{Rumi’s Cave fieldwork, 24/11/2017.}. The management team at Rumi’s includes people from diverse tariqas, a non-Muslim woman and the daughter of Shaykh Babikir. Unlike traditional shaykh-mureed relationships, many attendees at RC do not take Shaykh Babikir as their sole spiritual guide, unless they have formalised this commitment through bay’ah\footnote{Initiation with a Sufi shaykh into a tariqa.}; nevertheless, they respect his position as the Shaykh and consider him a source of spiritual guidance. On meeting the Shaykh at RC, some attendees may request to speak to him and give their initiation at a later stage. Due to Shaykh Babikir’s absence in daily management, irregular or first-time visitors may not even be aware of his presence, nor his role in governing the organisation.

At GH, all of the trustees, except one, have taken bay’ah with Shaykh al-Yaqoubi and were initiated into the Shadhili tariqa prior to starting their work at GH.\footnote{Fieldwork, informal interviews with members of staff at GH, 31/07/2018.} Unlike at RC, the Shaykh’s visits are much more infrequent as he is largely situated abroad. All of the staff are
Muslim and the key leaders are the charity trustees, some of whom are scholars of religion. This includes a female teacher, referred to as ‘Shaykha’\textsuperscript{116}.

Most staff and volunteers at GH are Sufi-inclined, although they may not be attached to any \textit{tariqa}, and most attendees are aware of the Ahl as-Sunnah and Sufi leanings of the organisation. Prior to an interview, prospective staff and volunteers are encouraged to read the mission statement, research the organisation and take a look at the events, in order to ensure they are comfortable with their religious inclinations, such as organising monthly \textit{mawlid} events. The staff at GH are assigned individual tasks, however this changes on a daily basis, according to the timetable of events. The staff and volunteers take on multiple roles, such as and not limited to: fundraising, administration, online marketing and events coordination. Depending on their level of experience, the volunteers usually participate in more ‘hands on’ work during events, such as supporting with registration, marketing, catering and cleaning (fieldnotes GH informal interviews with staff, 31/07/2018).

Both centres are staffed during events, although opening hours will depend on their timetable of activities. Managers and trustees support the administration by holding meetings out of hours. During events, the speakers and organisers vary and come from different backgrounds, some of whom are regular attendees at the centres. Both attendees and speakers are affiliated with other organisations, \textit{tariqas} and religious groups.

People shared the lessons and stories that they had heard from different \textit{shaykhs} (fieldnotes RC, 25/10/2017).

One man spoke a lot about the \textit{tariqa} he followed in Manchester and how his \textit{shaykh} does a lot of work for the youth. He had travelled from Manchester to attend the event today at Rumi’s (fieldnotes RC, 11/11/2017).

This is a feature of modern day religiosity, as most people share multiple affiliations, which may even differ from, or contradict, their own religious leanings (Gottschalk 2013); just as

\textsuperscript{116} This is an honorary title, not to be conflated with ‘\textit{shaykh}’.
people who are not scholars play an increasingly visible and important role in defining religion (Bruinessen and Howell 2007).

5.3 Gender

Both centres host an array of activities to engage several demographics (male and female, children, youth and adults, Muslims and non-Muslims). Changes in gender dynamics provide new opportunities for young Muslims to participate in religious activities. Where formal religious institutions, such as mosques and Sufi tariqas, are predominately male-dominated, in leadership and audience (see Geaves 2000; Ahmad and Sardar 2012), RC and GH allow both genders to participate in events and management. As most women are restricted to enter sacred spaces at a fixed time, such as during set classes or prayer times, or when accompanied by a male relative (mahram) (Geaves 2000; Ahmad and Sardar 2012), these centres provide a fluid form of engagement, with an open-door policy for everybody to come and go as they please. However, the parameters of gender interactions differ between the organisations.

At RC, there are no fixed rules on gender segregation. In most gatherings, members of staff are comprised of both men and women, who often sit beside one another and communicate freely. Male and female interactions are fluid, which alter depending on the format, or type, of event. For instance, prior to congregational prayer (salah), men and women, particularly those who are acquainted with one another from previous events, can be seen talking and laughing. However, once the khateeb takes his position, the men move closer towards him, separating themselves from the women, who also re-arrange their position further away, towards the back of the room.117 This arrangement mirrors customary practice for congregational prayers in mosques, but also indicates the implicit and unspoken social and religious etiquette and expectations about what counts as acceptable normative practice. However, on completion of prayers, they reconvene as a joint assembly. Certain events are advertised as ‘male’ and ‘female only’, such as, sisters mawlid gatherings. This is not always due to a religious ruling; rather organisers take into consideration the sentiments of external events holders and attendees. For example, some women are uncomfortable singing in

117 Fieldnotes Rumi’s Cave Friday prayer, 27/10/2017.
melodies in front of the opposite gender (either for religious reasons or because they felt shy or self-conscious).

RC has been under scrutiny from wider Muslim communities because of their approval of free-mixing at the venue. This was shared during some of my conversations with participants. An interlocutor who visited RC frequently, yet held conservative views on gender interactions, informed me:

They are perceived as more liberal than other Islamic communities— not in terms of practice and belief—more in terms of gender mixing. Guys and girls were holding hands in the retreat in Konya in Shaykh’s presence. People hold that against them, they’re assumed to be ‘bad’ people. However, their beliefs are quite orthodox (paraphrased fieldnotes, RC 02/12/2017).

These views were discussed by staff at GH, who support RC’s engagement with Sufism, but deem mixed-gender interactions impermissible (haram). They believe RC’s geographical location, is linked to their flexibility on gender rulings. In comparison to the North of England, London and the South of England is arguably more cosmopolitan, thus religious institutions can potentially accommodate religious interpretations more easily.¹¹⁸ A similar sentiment was shared by a participant at RC, who claimed staff want to accommodate people who hold divergent views or are “on different spectrums of religiosity” (verbatim quote, fieldnotes 02/12/2017). This points to the adaptability of Sufi organisations for audience engagement.

Unlike RC, GH have a policy which advocates gender segregation, premised on a juristic belief which prohibits men and women from unnecessarily socialising and forming illicit relationships. This is occasionally enforced through a room partition. When a divider is not present, ordinarily men and women are seated across from each other and once there is a majority on either side, new or late attendees can assume where they are expected to be seated. Whilst a seated separation is encouraged, there remains some flexibility for cross gender interfaces, such as when speaking with members of staff or volunteering. In these circumstances, there is no intervention, and the individual can act in accordance with their

¹¹⁸ These thoughts were shared during fieldwork conversations with members of staff at GH, 31/07/2018.
religious understandings, either by speaking freely, or monitoring their tone of voice and mannerisms.

Conversational exchanges between the genders are more flexible during public events, which often attracts new attendees from different religious backgrounds. These activities are typically hosted within confined spaces, where the implementation of gender segregation would be impractical. Limitations on gender interactions were not restricted to a physical space and were evident during events at external venues, for example, groups were instructed not to take any (audio/visual) recordings of female nasheed artists (munshidas) as social media accounts can be accessed by male followers.

Most of the social gatherings at GH are comprised of young people seeking marriage partners aged 20-30. As these activities facilitated group interactions, gender segregation prohibited men and women from creating (unlawful or illicit) friendships and relationships. As an alternative, ‘male/brothers’ and ‘sisters/female only’ events were scheduled (see Figure 33) to provide individuals the space to build new networks and freely express themselves, in ways they may not be comfortable to do in front of the opposite gender, due to religious confines (e.g. taking off the hijab, projecting their voices, exercising and engaging in jokes and laughter).
In the evening the tour guide gave us instructions. The Shaykha advised the women that we can take off our hijab in the accommodation as there were no men around. She joked with the non-Muslim guide “We don’t sleep in hijabs, we’re not bald!” *laughter*. She then told the group not to take pictures of people as there are women not wearing hijab in the accommodation and to respect people’s privacy (fieldnotes GH Ladies Retreat, 05/08/2018).

The implementation of rulings on gender interactions are socially constructed by religious actors, who negotiate what is considered appropriate religious practice. This is also a point of contestation for the two centres, despite both being governed by Sufi shaykhs. Nevertheless, they are not intransigent, and in comparison to Sufi orders, there are no designated rules. When producing events, their aspiration to involve people with varying levels of religious practice encourage them to be more flexible and consider intention (*niyyah*). Intention is an individualistic, internal sacred compass for many people to navigate their spirituality, including their involvement with the opposite gender. *Niyah* will be discussed further in the following chapter.

**5.4. Charity and Social Action**
In these centres the production of Sufism is framed around service to British communities. These grassroots initiatives support Muslim and non-Muslim populations. RC rely on community support and fundraise through online websites, which provides users with the option to choose which project they want to donate to: Rumi’s Cave, Rumi’s Kitchen or Rumi’s Care\textsuperscript{119}. They also raise money for their centre through: community donations (including people dropping off money at the centre); selling food and products during events; and inviting external speakers who hire the space and run paid (ticketed) activities. When Rumi’s had limited funds and/or partnered with other charities they became concerned about their sustainability - without compromising their values or being undermined by the policies of other organisations. Over the last year, Penny Appeal, a charity which Shaykh Babikir endorses, has sponsored the organisation by supporting them with a large majority of their finances. In return, RC and Shaykh have supported them with their charity appeals (fieldnotes 24/11/2017).

According to Rumi’s Kitchen 2015 and 2016 annual reports\textsuperscript{120}, the provision of their services helps to overcome issues of loneliness and isolation. In their reports, they also highlighted some of their key contributions: volunteers completing food hygiene courses; delivering an Easter outreach programme; supplying food packs to rough sleepers around central London; inviting National Health Service (NHS) representatives to test people for tuberculosis; and, distributing clothing. The reports also share visitor feedback, statistics on guest participation and food budgets. The latter documents donations and sponsors by Muslim charities, such as Islamic Relief, donations from local organisations, such as schools, as well as collaborations with other religious organisations.\textsuperscript{121} Similarly, through Rumi’s Care, the centre runs a wellbeing café, ‘Tea Thursdays’, to promote social inclusion amongst the elderly and prevent social isolation, by enabling contact and friendship with others. They also provide elderly communities and their carers access, advice and information on external local services, who deliver support, social groups and events, physical and emotional wellbeing.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{119} [https://www.rumis.org/donate](https://www.rumis.org/donate) <last accessed 13/07/2019>.
\textsuperscript{120} For the full list of reports please see [https://www.rumis.org/kitchen](https://www.rumis.org/kitchen) <last accessed 13/04/2020>.
\textsuperscript{121} Found at [https://www.rumis.org/kitchen](https://www.rumis.org/kitchen) <last accessed 14/07/2019>.
\textsuperscript{122} Found at [https://www.rumis.org/care](https://www.rumis.org/care) <last accessed 14/07/2019>.
On one occasion, I participated in the ‘Christmas Special’ at Rumi’s Kitchen, in a local Bareli-oriented mosque. The soup kitchen was comprised of over twenty volunteers and thirty attendees of different religious and ethnic backgrounds. Managers at RC had fundraised for the event and local communities donated money towards food and gifts. One of the managers informed me that the theme was important (despite being a non-Muslim celebration), as festivities are a time of bringing people together and promoting solidarity. The volunteers, both men and women, used the mosque’s kitchen facilities to cook fresh food for their guests, which was served in the community hall – tears streaming from their eyes as they peeled a full bag of onions! (fieldnotes 17/12/2017).

The room was decorated with balloons, as well as paper chains, that the volunteers had made on the day. The tables were set with miniature Christmas trees and crackers, glitter and chocolate. The volunteers reflected good character, as they welcomed attendees openly and wholeheartedly, by engaging in friendly conversations and treating them equally. One volunteer casually shared, “they don’t ask attendees their circumstances or why they attend and neither do they turn anyone down” (fieldnotes 17/12/2017). As a researcher, I too was expected to participate – it would have appeared impertinent to not support their team, who were working all day. This was a significant moment, as only by contributing, I could fully appreciate the volunteers’ efforts. It was an arduous duty to stand in the kitchen for long hours to help prepare and cook fresh meals, alongside decorating the room and attending to guests. Young volunteers take their own initiative to redefine social and religious spaces, considering this their civic and religious duty.
Similarly, GH’s charitable aim is “to contribute in building a vibrant, productive and prosperous community through delivering a range of social and educational programmes
across Greater Manchester”. Initially, the founders intended to create a sustainable institution, without relying on donations. Having previously experimented with hosting religious classes under ‘Al Huda Courses’ and moving between different rented venues, the building was acquired and purchased outright in 2017, using goodwill loans (qarz-e-hasanah) donated by members of local communities. This prevented the organisers from borrowing money on interest from the banks, which they deemed haram.

We’re thinking about the project plans for 30, 50, 100 years ahead, and not just 3-5 years. It’s a modern-day organisation to serve the British Muslim community and give a positive portrayal of Islam. It presents Islam in a good light, invites people to the religion of Islam and helps different Muslims...With loans it’s the best of both worlds, they reap rewards of Hereafter and get their money back, instead of giving donations alone...From the start we wanted to have a strong financial foundation so the events could be more regular...People have seen the direction of organisation and staff- they felt the vision which compelled larger donors to give money and help the organisation (Trustee 3, fieldnotes Guidance Hub, 31/07/2018).

Community donations and paid events enable the organisation to improve their services and remain operational, by covering bills, staff fees and other expenses.

Most of GH’s events and services are free, and there are options for voluntary donations and non-monetary donations (e.g. desks, carpets, food). When they issue a fee for the provision of some services, they ensure that costs are affordable for the community (in most circumstances payments are subsidised). GH is largely funded by local Muslim communities, through collections, paid activities and communal events, such as charity car washes and bake sales. They share their bank details both offline and online, as an option for those who want to make a one-off donation and to help make the centre debt-free. Unlike Rumi’s, they have created a membership scheme, requesting regular donations, from ten pounds a month. These monthly donations support: Islamic courses; children’s workshops

and nurturing activities; community projects; new-Muslim support networks; counselling services; and, sports clubs.¹²⁵ This membership scheme is merely a financial scheme – a standing order in exchange for additional benefits offered by the centre – and should not to be conflated with association, whereby a group of people are organised or bound to the organisation for a joined purpose.

On setting up a standing order, donors are sent a gift as a gesture of appreciation. Alongside supporting GH’s projects, they receive discounts on their services and with the external organisations that have partnered with the centre, including local food chains and clothing brands. During conversations with the trustees, they informed me that they did not want to charge the community to attend courses, as they believe Islamic education should be free, open and accessible to all. However, to deliver events to a high-standard, their projects had to also be financially sustainable. In order to maintain a balance between the administration costs of activities and holding events at a high standard they came to a decision to charge attendees at certain times. They also charge fees for some religious courses to uphold a commitment.¹²⁶

Figure 36: GH’s monthly membership scheme as found on their website (Source: Website).

¹²⁶ Fieldnotes GH 31/07/2018.
Figure 37: GH fundraising challenge poster, with donated competition prizes for the highest five fundraisers (Source: GH Facebook).

Figure 38: ‘Dial a Dessert’, a GH partnership with dessert companies: all proceeds are given to the Hub as charity (Source: GH Facebook).
As a collaborative organisation with multifunctional spaces, the Hub arrange community projects, such as homeless feeds, community clean ups and social gatherings, and events promoting healthcare and mental health. They also provide advocacy services to assist people on how to fill out forms and have created networking events to tackle issues of social isolation. One example is, ‘Chit Chat Chai’ for women and children, of all ages, to “encourage positivity, learning, and well-being amongst one another” by meeting others and communicating on issues of concern. In addition to this, GH have worked with the NHS and have allowed nurses to use their venue for community blood donations. These social action projects serve and support the welfare of wider British communities. External organisations may also operate within the GH venue, such as Sacred Vows, Islamic Sciences of Nurturing and Development (ISNAD) Institute and the Manchester Qur’an Academy (MQA). This is because it is economical for the trustees at GH to run these events at the same venue as their

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128 For more information see https://isnad.courses/ <last accessed 16/01/2018>.
staff also work for these organisations. GH are currently not involved in any international projects as they want to excel their services for communities in Greater Manchester (fieldnotes 31/07/2018).

The production of Sufi activities through charitable projects reflects an accommodation to the surrounding social milieu and an ethos of service to British society. Maintaining communal
ties through social action has remained a significant tradition within Sufi orders (Werbner and Basu 1998; Werbner 2002a). In a quintessential manner, Sufi-inspired organisations in the UK have focused on giving back to the communities in which they are based, through (Sufi) principles of *khidma*, hospitality, and humility. What is unique, is the tailoring of their communal services to young Muslim audiences.

5.5 Commercial profits: Secular and Religious Commodities

The ‘State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2018/19’ estimates that Muslims spent US$2.1 trillion across the food, beverage and lifestyle sectors in 2017, and estimates spending will rise to $3 trillion by 2023.¹²⁹ The ‘global halal’¹³⁰ product market alone was worth more than $45.3 billion in 2016 and is expected to increase to over $58.3 billion by 2022.¹³¹ Sufi paraphernalia were sold via RC and GH through both events and social media, in order to meet a consumer demand for halal products and services.

Although RC and GH do not raise money for commercial profits, many of their methods of raising charitable income are modelled on production and consumption, via marketing strategies, tailoring services to meet the users’ needs, promotion of the centre, audience engagement and enabling the purchase of education, products and services. These are targeted to meet the demands of a primarily British Muslim demographic. For instance, the Hub have raised money for the centre through entrepreneurial enterprises, which include: a tuck shop selling refreshments during some events; selling GH branded merchandise (such as, printed logo clothing as uniforms¹³²; bags, notebooks and pens); and, providing freelance work by outsourcing projects to other organisations and sales through the Guidance Hub Gift Centre. The gift centre is available both during events and is featured on their website, selling a collection of Islamic books, including texts dedicated to the study of Sufism¹³³. The products

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¹³⁰ Legally permissible according to Islamic jurisprudence.
¹³² Includes jackets and hoodies which are sometimes used as uniforms to identify members of staff and volunteers during events.
are marketed and sold for their religious and otherworldly benefits, occasionally with reference to a Hadith, and these profits are used to fund the work of the centre.

Figure 42: GH ‘Fragrance Collection’ advertised with a Hadith transmitted by the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) on the benefits of using incense (Source: GH Website).

Figure 43: The ‘Miscellaneous Collection’, gift items include CD recordings of Islamic teachings by GH’s patron, Shaykh Muhammad al-Yaqoubi (Source: GH Website).

The sale of Islamic, cultural and Sufi paraphernalia, as well as food and paid services, meet the British Muslim consumer demand for halal products and initiatives. This allows young
audiences to progress with their faith and engage with Sufi Islam in a congenial and entertaining way. “Consumerism underpins spiritual shopping” (Aldridge 2007, p.15). Many British Muslims do not see themselves as consumers who are influenced by marketing and advertising, rather they are in search for a higher purpose beyond societal commercialism (Wuthnow 2005, p.119). The sale of artefacts and commodities, some of which have no sacred value (such as the ‘Kylie Jenner lip kit’ sold at the GH Eid souk, see Figure 45) invites young Muslim buyers to purchase a mainstream product, that will be a medium to assist a social and religious cause (i.e. as charitable funds). Trading religious paraphernalia is an important entrepreneurial cause for these groups, to both sustain their work and encourage young Muslims to retain their religious and cultural identities. The impact of the production of Sufi paraphernalia will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, through the social media enterprise ‘Barakah Base’.

Figure 44: Barakah Base stall at GH’s Eid Souk, featuring products used by actors on a Turkish television serial, alongside Yemeni shawls, prayer beads, wooden crafted incense burners and Mevlevi hats (Source: Author 2018).
5.6 Events and activities

At both institutions, religious production and consumption is also apparent through customer-oriented services, where events are created based on the needs of the consumers (primarily young British Muslims). This fills the gap in the current religious market, where mosques and other faith-based institutions are sometimes unable to meet their requirements (GH fieldnotes, 05/08/2018). This is also displayed during event planning, as one member of staff claimed, their philosophy is “heavily concentrated in community service” and thus they will consider their audience feedback and suggestions when planning events.134 The provision of additional religious services wherein attendees can find communal support has been a longstanding tradition within Sufi fraternities:

“Religious markets in Islamic societies consisted of the supply of religious goods offered by the Sufi shaykhs and their network of followers. For common people, the religious goods offered by Sufi brotherhoods, such as rituals, healing and welfare services, were often very important. The Sufi shaykh would cater to the religious needs of common people, something the legalised Islam of the scholars (ulama) could not always do” (Brekke 2016, pp.84–85, italics in original).

Both organisations host regular weekly and monthly events, some of which people can join without commitment or registration. For instance, RC hold open mic nights and film clubs (also referred to as ‘movie night’) and GH organise ‘Burdah Nights’. Some of these events coincide with the Islamic calendar (such as, spiritual reminders during the month of Ramadan, and mawlid events and poetry in praise of the Prophet specifically during Rabi ul Awwal). Other events correspond with the Gregorian calendar, such as national events and holidays (see Figure 46). This is not to ‘celebrate’ these festivities, but rather provide people with an alternative setting to enjoy an event that is considered part of British culture. Similarly, events coincide with (British) social awareness campaigns, such as ‘Mental Health Awareness Week’, and both RC and GH host events for people to understand the Islamic and scientific perspective. Both centres also deliver dhikr gatherings, both with and without the presence of a shaykh. However, often these were only held for male participants, and therefore I was unable to participate within these assemblies.

The centres operate as a ‘religious marketplace’, a metaphor which social theorists have developed to show how modern followers of religion have an array of options, provided by faith institutions, for people to shop around (Warner 1993). This facilitates multiple affiliation and intra-Sufi networking, particularly when these groups host joint initiatives with other Sufi centres (Dressler 2010; Rozehnal 2019). Unlike tariqas which call for (strict) group membership and association, at these centres, people can turn to Sufism when looking for a spiritual outlet, and each event can bring new followers or people who are attending for the
first time (see Hazen 2014). With the option to ‘drop in’ to classes, some of which may not be premised on religion, the individual can make the decision to choose an activity which suits their preference (Kurtz 2007), and experiment without commitment (Aldridge 2007); albeit a prolonged commitment may be sustained through monetary payments for extended courses.

Certain events may be produced by staff at the centres and then hosted in different cities or in other organisations within the same locality. This is considered ‘outreach work’, in order to encourage people to enrol onto courses and increase understanding about the work of their organisation. Similarly, events in external settings may also be run by staff who work for either RC or GH, but are associated with more than one centre, or are invited as guest speakers. For example, Greengate Trust have invited the teachers at GH to their centre in Oldham to deliver talks for the youth. This creates a network between different Sufi-oriented organisations and the teachers in these groups will typically be affiliated with the Ahl as-Sunnah, though the audiences may be non-sectarian.

Figure 48: Collaborative event with Greengate Trust and GH held in Oldham (Source: GH Facebook).
Religious change occurs from transformations in the supply of religion, more than the demands of consumers (Finke and Iannaccone 1993). Whilst the consumers preference informs the production of religious activity, what is produced shapes the adaptation of religious activity and engagement. The production of these events is modelled on ‘supply and demand’: the organisations recognise the needs of their target audiences (primarily young British Muslims) and provide the services that meet their requirements. This was evidenced in my conversation with a member of staff at GH,

We looked into different organisation models. The charity model suited our aims and objectives and it suits everyday needs. We wanted to host as a charity and fundraise and gather gift aid. When we launched we consulted Shaykh Muhammad Al Yaqoubi, who is the spiritual patron of project and he named the project Guidance Hub. We update him on activities, and he prays for the organisation, “makes dua for us”, provides guidance and advice. He asked us to do more communal and fun activities to benefit local communities. GH serves the local community, both Muslim and non-Muslim, although the organisation is primarily for Muslims. GH connects them to Islam and spirituality – morals and characteristics, the spirit of Islam, not just to follow laws but practice Islam inwardly, get people to become better people.

Figure 49: Poster titled ‘Sufism and Islam’ organised by GH, held in Rochdale (Source: GH Facebook).
We don’t call for any particular group or political party, we let people make own decisions (Trustee 2, GH 31/07/2018).

The centres have met the demand for the provision of Islamic teaching for young Muslims by British-born scholars, in the English language (Lewis 1994). This educates attendees on Islamic spirituality and its history, as well as religious laws and jurisprudence. Sufi organisations and religious actors engaging in Sufi practices are not in competition with one another in the same way other religious institutions have been previously in the face of secularisation (Davie 2015). Rather, they have sought to compete with the services provided by the existing Islamic infrastructures, some who have failed to recognise the socio-religious aspects of young people’s lifestyles. This is not about replacing mosques and tariqas, but supplementing them.

There remains an element of negotiation, whereby Sufi-inspired centres and figures, negotiate and borrow ideas amongst themselves, after evaluating how to increase public engagement, according to what has and has not worked previously. This is ‘supply and demand’, and similar to Weismann’s (2007) conceptualisation of Sufi groups’ self-examination process. This is where Sufi movements maintain themselves because they are not reactionary in response to social attitudes. Instead, they organically develop and transform according to their social contexts. This is characteristic of modernity, whereby change occurs after societies undergo a process of reflection and hold a future-facing outlook (Giddens 1990; Beck 1992).

Many events are led by students of ulama and Sufi shaykhs, which offers a bridge between mosques and Sufi orders. This meets the demands of young people who have the agency to practice religion as they require and seek alternative religious institutes. Young people are not rejecting or moving away from organised religion as seen in other trends on religious change (see Einstein 2007). Rather they are seeking an individual journey, to find the institutions that facilitate a personal relationship with the Divine.

Some participants felt Islam was taught too strictly to them when they were younger so these community organisations which connect them to religion through social and spiritual events
make them ‘feel closer’ and betters their relationship with the religion (fieldnotes GH, 05/08/2018).

Attendees were not moving away from orthodox traditions, rather they acquire religious knowledge and translate this in ways that relate to their experiences in the West.

A huge part of Sufi tradition is the dissemination of knowledge and sharing Sufi teachings, which is what Rumi does. This is what makes it ‘Sufi’ today...Shaykh Babikir implicitly delivers Sufi messages, even when discussing commentaries on the Quran (fieldnotes, RC 27/10/2017).

This dismantles reified understandings of Sufism, whether this stems from preconceived negative conceptions or romanticised notions. It conveys Sufi traditions are rooted in authentic sacred texts. This was particularly important for staff at GH, who feared that contemporary Sufism is considered ‘liberal’, and wanted to teach that tasawwuf was a key aspect of the Ahl as-Sunnah tradition. One member of staff shared the importance of not only teaching religious laws but allowing people to “feel the faith” (fieldnotes 31/07/2019). This also supports the claim that young Muslims in the West are more likely to acquire autonomy in their approach to religious authorities, without disregarding them (Nielsen 2013).

As found in previous research, there were also people in my study who were reading spiritual literature and engaging in Sufism and attending classes out of personal interest and not just for edification (Sedgwick 2008).

She hadn’t attended Rumi’s for a few years, but she would go during university to give herself a sense of community and connection with Islam. She mentioned her attendance at Rumi’s does not inform her understanding of Islam, nor her interests in Sufism, but she enjoys the Sufi element (fieldnotes RC, 25/11/2017).

The managers within the centres consciously provide unique, versatile spaces, that allow contested religious identities to be negotiated and for people to experiment with Sufi practice, in non-denominational settings. Communal practice remains a large part of forming
Sufi identities (Werbner and Basu 1998), but there is an increase in people following a more individualistic path (Dressler 2010, p.79), that does not have the rigour of conventional Sufi learning (i.e. via shaykh-mureed relationships). Unlike Davie's (1994) ‘believing without belonging’, I conceptualise this as ‘selective belonging’. Young Muslims prefer a more fluid engagement, one that involves religious authority and orthodoxy, but provides flexibility, that is negotiable and non-authoritarian. This form of individualism will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter on religious consumption.

Many events are available outside of the regular madrassa class times (4-7pm) and can be undertaken on a part-time basis, accommodating women and young students. The provision of ‘additional’ facilities, including changes in opening hours, crèche services, permitting children to attend events when accompanied by an adult, free refreshments, leisure and recreational activities are further incentives for people to attend the centres. These centres produce facilities that the existing Islamic infrastructures (e.g. mosques) do not deliver enough of, or, cannot provide at all.

The production of Sufi activities at these centres corresponds to the market model of religion and the rational choice theory, where religious producers work to attract their customers by filling a gap in the existing landscape, and consumers make decisions on which services meet their needs (Iannaccone 1992; Finke and Iannaccone 1993). Producing diverse events, most of which have a Sufi-impetus, makes Sufism palatable for those of different religious predilections. Young Muslims recognise their cultural and religious differences, both amongst their faith communities and in wider British society, and whilst these are important factors for them, they negotiate these identities for a harmonious society and make wider social contributions (Davie 2015, p.61). Many of the events are free or priced at an affordable cost, which attracts more visitors (see Finke and Stark 1992, p.60). Although mosques and Sufi tariqas are also free to visit, the centres offer competitive prices in comparison to paid institutional courses and social enterprises. This is further enabled through digital technologies.

5.7 The Internet and Social Media
There is a close relationship between new media and religion, where technology mirrors lived religion, whilst simultaneously fashioning the way we perceive religion (Davie 1994; Davie 2015). This has been further augmented by the Internet, where religious messages can be viewed and disseminated by anyone, without any authority or vetting process. This can cause viewers to perceive people as religious authorities based on their online activities. The medium through which individuals access religion online is constantly developing. More people now use the Internet on mobile devices (such as, phones and tablets), as opposed to deskbound devices (computers), which can help people to quickly disseminate and retrieve information about Islam (Bunt 2018, p.146).

Although some social media networks can be accessed via web browsers (such as, WhatsApp, Snapchat and Instagram), they best function on mobile phone applications. Some websites, such as Instagram and Facebook, also require users to download the mobile application in order to access certain features, such as contacting or ‘messaging’ other users. This mechanism supports quicker, fast-paced virtual access and interconnected environments. Individuals can use the Internet, post and read status updates and share their ‘offline’ activities (through photographs and videos) whilst being simultaneously present in a physical and virtual space. Through mobile video calling and live cinematography, users in offline spaces can communicate online. Many young people on the Internet have multiple social media accounts and use these applications in conjunction with one another (Bunt 2018, pp.54-55). Social media data on one account can be re-shared on other applications. This content can also be re-uploaded onto multiple other websites. As an instant networking platform, it facilitates a fast-paced and convenient access to religious activity.

Sufi organisations have made use of these online functions as a strategy for the production and advertisement of their activities to engage younger audiences. They promote their social media accounts to make people aware of their events and services. Here are some examples of RC and GH’s social media activities, captured through their Facebook pages:
Figure 50: RC Facebook Homepage, features a quote by Jalaluddin Rumi, a list of upcoming events and options to and options to contact the organisation (Source: RC Facebook 2019).

Figure 51: Number of people who either like or follow the page’s activity. Facebook generated of 4.8 out of 5 star rating based on 184 reviews by users (Source: RC Facebook 2019).
This endorsement captures the ways in which their work has been received by the wider public, although it is important to note that because this is a public platform, people can review their work without witnessing it.

Figure 52: ‘About’ section on RC Facebook Page (Source: Facebook 2019).

Figure 53: GH Facebook Homepage, including number of followers and options to ‘donate’ and ‘send message’ to the organisers (Source: GH Facebook 2019).
Figure 54: GH ‘About’ section on Facebook with information on opening hours, business information, ‘mission’ and contact information (Source: GH Facebook 2019).

Figure 55: 5-star rating generated on GH Facebook Page based on four reviews (Source: GH Facebook 2019).
Social media accounts, such as Facebook pages, facilitate the outreach of a person and organisation(s) – their work is no longer confined to one geographic location, which allows people to connect with the institution and benefit from their posts, without ever visiting their premises. As this work is promoted on a ‘public’ page and all the posts are fixed on this setting, every Facebook user can access their feed, without ‘following’ or ‘liking’ the page. Below are some examples of the ways in which users can engage with Facebook posts:

Figure 56: Facebook users or followers have the option to ‘react’ to a post, or ‘like’, ‘comment’ and ‘share’ (Source: Facebook 2019).

Figure 57: Use of hashtags (#)- all Facebook users can see this content by searching the name of the hashtag (Source: GH Facebook 2019).
This helps promote the post - concurrently generating a national and international audience. Here GH have edited a picture with a Hadith and added ‘#GHdailyQuotes’ to the post.

![Image of a livestreamed event](https://example.com/livestream.jpg)

*Figure 58: Livestreamed event uploaded by GH (Source: GH Facebook 2019).*

There is also an option to share your location, for instance if another organisation is hosting an event arranged by GH or their staff elsewhere.

![Image of a poll](https://example.com/poll.jpg)

*Figure 59: GH online questionnaire via a poll for users to vote on a particular topic (Source: GH Facebook 2019).*
Users can create different types of status updates on their personal accounts and public pages, in the form of ‘posts’, such as ‘life events’ (e.g. anniversaries) or to share photographs, videos, livestream videos and ‘check in’ to events. They are also able to share their specific ‘feeling’ or ‘activity’ either by clicking on a limited number of emotions provided by Facebook or by typing out what the actions they are undertaking. Moreover, the option to ‘tag friends’ allows users to share the event with users on their ‘friends list’ or to attach the names of the people who they are attending with.
The ‘About’ and ‘Discussion’ section underneath the event description, allows the organisers to engage with Facebook users, to provide them with more details and to answer any queries about the event. Any last-minute changes are also posted here, such as cancellations or timing adjustments.

On their websites, both organisations describe the involvement of the Shaykh(s) – who are patrons of these organisations – however, their social media pages do not disclose this information. Therefore, despite their strong links to normative Islam, it does not accurately reflect the religious activities that take place within these centres, nor the role of the shaykh in governing the organisations. This may be because they describe themselves as ‘spiritual’ but not ‘Sufi’, as they are not tariqa-based. It may also be a marketing technique to portray themselves as non-sectarian and encourage non-Muslims and less-practising Muslims to visit the centres in person.\(^{135}\) The Internet is a modern way of fostering support for religious groups and gathering new audiences, as shown in previous research:

\(^{135}\) These patterns were identified during the data analysis.
“Social activism amongst Sufis, in general, has translated in an increasing numbers of ways since the mid twentieth century: using modern technologies and media (such as demotic literature, cassettes and CDs, the internet, social networking sites, blogs, and discussion forums) to communicate and market the messages of Sufi orders attracting new adherents and associates, particularly among South Asian expatriates and westerners” (Hermansen 2012, p.270).

Sufism on social media is not only a form of da’wah work to provide non-Muslims with a flavour of Islam, but also conveys the foundations of Sufism to non-Sufis, to clarify misunderstandings (Rozehnal 2019, p.167). It is also an archive where people can access religion online. Both religious actors and events can be reviewed and critiqued via feedback underneath ‘comments’ sections.

Religious groups use branding and logos to create a visual identity, enabling them to remain visible in a commercial culture and reach a wider network of religious consumers (Einstein 2007). Even though there may be diversity of supply, they must meet the needs of their consumers (Hatch 1989). The Internet facilitates a spiritual marketplace, where Sufi organisations/figures can engage in mass advertising (Dressler 2010; Rozehnal 2019), promote their activities (or themselves) and engage new audiences.

“By combining digital words, sounds, and images to produce ever more complex narratives, Sufis are discovering new ways to deploy digital media to amplify their messages and expand their networks” (Rozehnal 2019, p.169).

There is an alternation between online and offline audiences: some begin by viewing social media pages, which encourage them to attend events, whilst others follow their pages after observing their work in person.

The attendees had travelled from different parts of the UK. One was visiting from France, as she had read about the retreat on social media, and the retreat sounded like a way she could learn about Islam in an enjoyable way (fieldnotes, GH Ladies Retreat 05/08/2019).
Online marketing techniques make events appear inviting and appealing that helps users to stay engaged, although sometimes attendees may feel let down by this process, when an event does not match up to online expectations. For example, some attendees at the GH Eid Souk criticised the event for not meeting its online reputation, as it was promoted better than it occurred.

The event was very busy and crowded. Not much room to navigate around the room. Some people felt disappointed as the event was advertised better than it was - it appeared to look more professional and larger scale online (fieldnotes, GH Eid Souk 09/06/2018).

As discussed in the literature review, much of the academic research on online Sufi communities have excluded the role of social media (Taher 2006; Cheruvallil-Contractor 2014), despite its prevalence amongst young Muslims. As categorised in Rozehnal's (2019, pp.168-169) study on ‘Cyber-Sufism’, Sufi communities online share a number of characteristics which include: multidimensional web page displays; integration of multimedia (audio files, photographs, videos and lives-streaming events); interfaces across multiple social media platforms, particularly on Facebook and YouTube; a dual emphasis on individual piety and collective identity; a spotlight on individual shaykhs; a focus on public events, such as lectures and retreats, public outreach and social engagement (including interfaith dialogue); and, multiple commercial dimensions, comprising of paid online programs, online shopping and fundraising campaigns. This methodical categorisation encapsulates the diverse mediums of online Sufi engagement that were present within this study.

In order to further examine and answer my second research question on the role of social media in contemporary religious expression, I now move onto introduce my online field sites.

5.8 Naat khwaani

Social media provides avenues for users to become ‘influencers’ based on their online prestige (see Cecelia and Røyneland 2018) which can impel followers towards certain brands, views and practices. It can also produce opportunities for users to create personal branding and place their content in a market for consumption. Youth naat khwaani is a way to maintain
transnational networks, revive and reinvent Sufi teachings through poetic performances and online celebrity culture.

The naat khwaans in this study self-identify under pre-defined business categories, provided by Instagram, including ‘Public figure’, ‘Artist’ and ‘Musician/Band’. They had also added additional labels, such as ‘faith-inspired nasheed artist’, ‘humanitarian aid worker’, ‘vlogger’ and ‘naat reciter’ in their social media ‘bio’s’\(^\text{136}\). Youth naat khwaani can be considered a commercial enterprise for Muslim consumerism. Reciters can be considered (spiritual) entrepreneurs, who are expected to deliver an entertaining performance for their audiences, supported via three primary sources of income: money gifted at mehfils, income generated from YouTube videos (users are paid by the platform on attaining a certain number of subscriber and views) (see Mosemghvdlishvili and Jansz 2013), and the sale of naat music and albums (both CDs and online streaming, such as Google Play, Amazon and iTunes). Additional streams of income include, attending paid events and making special appearances, for example live recitations during weddings.

![Naat trailer video advertisement](source: Facebook)

5.8.1 Modus operandi

\(^{136}\) A ‘bio’ is a short ‘about me’ section.
Online engagement amongst *naat khwaans* is diverse, as they post status updates, stories\(^{137}\), photographs and videos. Media video content also varies, ranging from: home videos, vlogs, stories, livestreamed and recorded *mehfils* and professional, ‘official’ *naat* videos (see Chapter Four). Home videos are not limited to their places of residence. It includes all the different places where *naats* are recited and recorded on personal devices (such as, mobile phones and cameras), including in car parks and restaurants. These can also be recorded on mobile phones as short ‘stories’, on Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram. *Mehfils* are usually recorded and livestreamed in private homes, public mosques and community centres, on mobile phones and cameras. These are typically uploaded onto YouTube and Facebook (which accommodates longer videos). Professional *naat* videos are usually recorded in a studio, to be directed and produced by a Muslim record company or producer. In addition to this, bite-sized clips can be uploaded and edited onto Instagram and other social networking accounts, which have a much shorter time limit for videos (approximately, one minute)\(^{138}\).

With the social media tools to ‘like’, ‘share’ and ‘follow’, the young *naat khwaans* online appearances quickly receive national and international exposure as their content can be disseminated quickly. On accumulating a large number of followers, the reciters create fan pages alongside their personal user accounts, and are now considered online ‘celebrities’. This is because the *naat khwaans* provide halal entertainment for their audiences, as supported by earlier research on youth *naat* recitation in Britain,

> “Although these practices can still be characterised as serious and even conservative, they are also aesthetic, performance-oriented and contemplative (or in some instances ecstatic) in nature” (Rosowsky 2018, p.415).

Islamic/Sufi music helps create an emotional experience with faith and a strong sense of identity amongst young Muslims (Jafari and Sandikci 2016); the reciters communicate sacred teachings through their choice of *kalaams* and listeners may reflect on their meanings. By evoking Islamic messages, it helps consumers to connect with their faith (Miyakawa 2005b, p.98).

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\(^{137}\) On Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram.

\(^{138}\) On personal Instagram accounts on their ‘main page’, does not include IG TV.
The young artists are curators of change. They are a part of a cultural production which has ethical foundations and points to a higher purpose beyond hyper-capitalism (Morris 2017a; Morris 2017b). They use their influence to increase awareness about shared communal concerns and raise money for charities. Furthermore, the purpose behind the production of some of their content is to inspire those of a similar background – an increasingly youthful demographic of British Muslims. *Naat khwaans* use social media to share religious activities, by displaying elements of their hybridised identities, such as their age-group (youth), ethnicity (British-Pakistani/South Asian) and religion (Islam, Ahl as-Sunnah). These are reflected through their online posts including: status-updates, use of languages, sartorial choices (merging Western apparel and designer wear with an ethnic and/or religious attire), online photographs and videos.

Although only some of the reciters in my sample were initiated into a Sufi order, they all share insights into their understanding of religion, rituals and devotion, as well the spiritual teachings of Ahl as-Sunnah *ulama* and *shuyookh*\(^{139}\), through audio and visual forms to promote Barelvi-Sufi traditions. Although the reciters do not explicitly self-identify as ‘Barelvis’ (preferring to adopt the term ‘Ahl as-Sunnah’, see Geaves 2000), much of the online content was oriented towards the Barelvi creed, such as the teachings shared by Imam Ahmad Raza Khan. The reciters also share Sufi practices by reciting classical Sufi poetry, visiting shrines (*mazaars*) and attending *dhikr*,\(^{140}\) celebrating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) (*mawlid*) and joining other spiritual gatherings (*mehfils*), many that are in the presence of the *ulama* and Sufi *shaykhs*.

\(^{139}\) Plural for *shaykh*.

\(^{140}\) Remembrance of God.
Figure 64: Youth naat khwaans, dressed in stylish Western apparel, reciting on stage at the Open Call event at Alexandra Park (Oldham), whilst recording each other's performances on their mobile phones (Source: YouTube).

Figure 65: ‘Night of Nasheeds’ poster produced to promote a charity event by youth naat khwaans (Source: Facebook).
Figure 66: Naat khwaan’s YouTube vlog of a trip to Pakistan reciting a kalaam and doing dhikr at the shrine of Sufi saint Pir Meher Ali Shah (Source: YouTube).

Figure 67: Youth conference hosted by Sufi organisations, young ulama and naat khwaans (Source: Facebook).
5.8.2 Transnational networks

For young reciters, _naat_ recitation is a devotional act which honours the Prophet. They consider their performances a means to uphold a sacred and cultural tradition and an act of worship to revive religious and spiritual traditions. _Naats_ preserve the poetry and teachings of religious authorities and Sufi saints, in their original languages.

_Neykaan de sang nekee naslaan naeen bhulaandey_
Buryaan de sang nekee kayey uttaa zoaf punchandey.
If you do good to pious men, they never forget it for generations,
If you do good to bad people, in return they will injure your feelings.

(Fieldnotes, segment of the Sufi poem ‘Saif ul Malook’ by Mian Muhammad Bakhsh, recited by a _naat khwaan_. Translated by the author).

The reciters generate support from senior _naat_ reciters from Pakistan, whom the youngsters initially saw as the source of their inspiration, as well as Pakistani news channels, Islamic television channels and _shaykhs_ and _ulama_ of the Ahl as-Sunnah tradition. This resulted in the formation of British regulatory _naat_ organisations, such as the National Youth Naat Association (NYNA) and Youth Quran Naat Council (YQNC)\(^1\), who support the reciters to create, produce and promote their content. The former help showcase the talent of young reciters, whereas the latter are more actively involved in their training and professional development.

\(^1\) YQNC. [https://en-gb.facebook.com/YouthQuranNaatCouncil/](https://en-gb.facebook.com/YouthQuranNaatCouncil/)

Figure 68: YQNC Facebook page (Source: Facebook).
When we were young we would watch Owais Qadri (senior Pakistani *naat khwaan*) in 2005, when he’d come to the UK, and on TV, and copy him, we wanted to recite like him (fieldnotes, YouTube video interview 2016).

Sufi expression through *naat khwaani* is a form of transnational Islam that ties British Muslims to those overseas (Werbner 2002; Nielsen et al. 2006). This is perpetuated by travel, audio-visual displays, and now the Internet (Bunt 2000; Ballard 2003). What is distinctive, is where previous research has shown religious and cultural traditions being ‘imported’ into Britain (see Werbner 1990; Geaves 2000; Werbner 2002a), the young reciters are ‘exporting’ their practices, which are now being replicated in their country of origin (Pakistan). For example, *naat* reciters from Pakistan emulated British reciters by producing their videos in a similar format (such as, recording and uploading *naats* in ‘selfie’ or ‘portrait’ mode on their social media accounts). They also engaged in collective practices by engaging in shared projects in the UK, and around the world, via social action and international travel to recite in *mehfils*. The lines between what is ‘British-Pakistani’ and ‘Pakistani’ *naat khwaani* traditions are blurred through global practices and digital technologies. Naat *khwaans* are concurrently consumers and producers of Sufi activity, who reproduce new performance styles online and in *mehfils*, by imitating international reciters, who they view in the same contexts.
5.8.3 Livestreaming

The ‘livestream’ option that is available on both Facebook and YouTube allows private (e.g. male only) gatherings (within homes) to become public, accessible nationally and internationally, viewed by all social media users. Youth *naat khwaans* can be present in an ‘offline’ space (such as, a home or a car) and gather an audience, who can request them to recite *naats* in real-time, through features such as ‘comments’ sections and ‘live chat’. Livestreaming is used by content producers as a form of ‘digital religion’, as conceptualised by Campbell (2013, pp.3–4), as it merges offline and online religion, whilst reconstituting technological and cultural spaces. This online tool was used by both Sufi organisations and *naat* reciters, which help bring private and invisible forms of religious practice into the public domain (see Berger and Luckmann 1967).

The option to livestream allows viewers to join a gathering without being physically present and observe an event at a time of their convenience. This can often be accessed at no cost to the user, from multiple devices, from the comfort of one’s home. One can benefit from gatherings at a spiritual centre, or from more than one teacher or guide, without committing to the groups’ traditions (see Cheruvallil-Contractor 2014). This further facilitates intra-Sufi networking (Rozehnal 2019). Changes in the role of the *shaykh* and *ulama* who post their content online, assists this process, as viewers do not have to prove their affiliation or sense of belonging. Online Sufi activity is a form of ‘lived religion’, which may be public, but is also quite private in part, and forms part of young people’s lifestyle choices. As the “modern world offers *immediate* benefits” (Wilson 1976, p.109), Sufism is produced online for people to access spirituality instantly, generating a ‘24/7 Sufism’.
Figure 70: Livestreamed ‘home-mehfil’ Facebook video by the YQNC of a group of young people, dressed in Western apparel, reciting naats in Urdu. 2.5k+ views (Source: Facebook).

Figure 71: Livestreamed video from YQNC. Comments can be created and viewed in both real-time and future (Source: Facebook).

5.8.4 Religious authority
The Internet can create both problems of authority and authenticity, as information shared on this platform is not always verifiable (Dawson and Cowan 2013). It is not always possible to determine whether a person’s religious views and practices are genuine and whether they are representative of their actual offline religious practice (Račius 2014, p.32). Moreover, an individual can gather a following on their own merit and be perceived, or self-declare, as an expert.

Social media pages provide supplementary marketing features, where users can pay money online to ‘promote’ or ‘sponsor’ their page. This creates a miniature post or advertisement on users’ personal ‘news feeds’, which can help a page to increase their following or engagement on a particular status update. Users can also pay Facebook to ‘boost’ a post, to ensure the post reaches a larger number of people.142 Once a certain number of followers or likes are attained, social media users may trust the account, and follow them, on the assumption that they are a well-established figure or brand.

Figure 72: Paid Facebook targeted advertisements and audience interaction (Source: Facebook).

142 A similar option is also available on Instagram – although users can also pay external parties to purchase ‘likes’ and ‘followers’ on their accounts.
The latter is an example of how social media marketing can sometimes inorganically build a person or organisations’ online presence and how this can be misleading. This can impact religious authority and authenticity, as individuals can create a social media presence and following by themselves, without having any credentials. British Muslims must critically evaluate this sphere, and because access to religion online can be individualistic it is not always clear whether there is an awareness of such processes.

*Naat* reciters can be considered, what Bunt (2018, p.81) refers to as ‘alternative authorities’; although they may not profess this title, they provide valuable insights “into contemporary Islamic diversity” as “they discuss important new issues” and “their opinions can be disseminated rapidly but not necessarily observed or followed”. However, online content cannot always be authenticated. On social media users can change the way they express their personality, which Yang et al. (2017) refer to as an ‘e-personality’, influencing the way they present themselves online:

“This online self does not necessarily reflect the entire self, rather, such information often reflects a carefully curated and manipulated self to conform to platform-specific social norms and expectations, one that showcases a person’s *idealised self*” (Yang et al. 2017, p.78).

For example, both the *ulama* and the wider public expect *naat* reciters to conceal any impermissible (*haram*) actions and exemplify good conduct and character. This is so rival groups (such as, Deobandis and Salafis) do not shown contempt towards the Barelvi *aqida* and group practices (e.g. *mawlids*), which are often criticised for *bid’ah*. These are examples of how religious authority can be construed, as online content creators can be considered an authority, without intending to have that influence. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.
For institutions like RC and GH there is a vetting process. Prior to attending the organisation and/or being livestreamed, organisers negotiate with speakers regarding the topic. In contrast, young naat reciters can upload recordings and status updates from their personal devices and create their own persona. This varies according to the type of content they upload, for example a video blog (vlog) of a reciter’s daily activities can sometimes reveal more than a status update. On the ‘vlog’ the reciter usually takes the viewer on a journey of their daily or weekly activities, to provide insights into the activities and events they are involved in. These are usually uploaded onto YouTube. Reciters often use ‘microblogging’ (see Dayter 2016) to recount an event from their own outlook.

Previous research has shown online activities are an extension of the offline (Dawson and Cowan 2013), but in these examples this may not be the case, as users can take an offline activity (out of context) and recreate a new version online. The functions on social media can allow one to script an online façade, generating inauthentic material and user engagement. For instance, audiences can be manipulated, as people can create a new personality and choose to limit aspects of their lifestyles. Vlogs can also be pre-planned and scripted, and users can filter negative reactions by disabling comments or keywords within the comments sections, creating a bias.

![Figure 74: YouTube comment settings options for ‘hidden users’ and ‘blocked words’ (Source: Website).](image)
5.9 Selling Sufi Paraphernalia

Having discussed different forms of Sufism online and religious commodification, I now move on to my final case study ‘Barakah Base’. On social media, managers of shopping stores create public accounts and pages to market and sell their products to a wider audience. Barakah Base mostly sell their merchandise online, consisting of Islamic and Sufi paraphernalia from Muslim-majority countries. As mentioned earlier, they hold stalls in different regions, mostly during events hosted by Sufi-inspired organisations, including Guidance Hub:

If you can't get to the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, or the Old Medina in Fez, then be sure to come and 'Souk Up The Atmosphere' on the 9th of June in Manchester for that Souky shopping experience! We hope to see you there Insha'Allah 😊

#Bazaar #Souk #Merchants #Craft #Art #Traditional #GuidanceHub#BarakahBase #EidSouk (Barakah Base Facebook Status, July 2018).

The page administrators also share teachings (via status updates, photographs and videos) from Sufi Shaykhs (both past and present), and information on travel to Sufi shrines.

“Keep track of your hours, because they are going, never to return. Pity the one who is heedless. Connect your daily practices of dhikr one to another, like links in a chain; you will find a benefit from it. Don’t make your heart busy with the worldly life, because it will take the importance of the Hereafter from your heart.

- Shaykh Sayid Jamaluddin al-Ghumuqi al-Husayni (licted)

(Fieldnotes, Barakah Base Facebook status).

The manufacture and use of Sufi paraphernalia is not new as historically, some Sufis wore patched clothing and held staffs (asa). However, this emblematic representation was criticised by Sufi teachers, like the eleventh century saint Ali al-Hujwiri, who wanted people to focus on morals and character (akhlaq), as opposed to exaggerating or standardising Sufi practice (Karamustafa 2007). In the contemporary period, the type of paraphernalia that is sold is reflective of the demands of the target audience, for instance, younger buyers are persuaded by the aesthetics of a product. Barakah Base market products used and worn by current Sufi teachers and post examples of live Sufi practice (such as, dhikr and mawlid).
gatherings to keep their audiences engaged. Here are some examples of their Facebook content:

“Green Yemeni Rida, as worn here recently by Habib Kadhim al-Saqqaf available at BarakahBase, ltd stock PM us for further details insha’Allah.

#Yemeni #Shawl #Sunnah #Traditional #Rida #Tarim #Habib #BarakahBase#Attire #Islam #Muslim #Sufi”

As discussed earlier, both GH and Barakah Base place a great emphasis on the Prophetic Sunnah when marketing products based on recommendations specified in Hadith, which retains a value for buyers in both worlds. Occasionally, some of the paraphernalia holds little sacred or spiritual benefit, but are symbolically meaningful, for people to convey a visual representation of their faith and beliefs. Islamic and Sufi paraphernalia, such as *tasbihs* and incense (*bukhoor*) are used as,
“‘Performative objects’ which express ‘a range of purposes, meanings and emotions’ of the communities that produce, circulate, and consume them...[which] may materialise experiences of longing for unity, diversity, healing and/or inner spiritual enlightenment” (Bowman 2016 cited in Vasquez 2016, p.236).

This confirms earlier findings that brands and marketers call on the spiritual meanings of products and services to promote their value (Rinallo et al. 2012).

It is important to distinguish between what constitutes as ‘Islamic’ and ‘Muslim’ consumerism, which can be modelled after Morris's (2016, p.74) conceptualisation of ‘practical’ and ‘symbolic’ consumerism. The former refers to products and services of religious functionality and practice, which can meet the needs of Muslim communities (e.g. Islamic clothing, prayer mats, also see Figure 43); whereas the latter denotes lifestyle and identity formation, through material culture, with no specific religious purpose (although it may be branded using Islam and Muslims, see Figures 42, 44) (Morris 2017b). Consequently, Islamic consumer products facilitate religious practice, whilst Muslim consumerism allows sacred and cultural products to be appropriated for recreational purposes and used in relation one’s lifestyle and identity. The impact of religious consumption will be discussed in the following chapter.

5.10 Sufi engagement

Having outlined the production of new Sufi forms through my field sites and exploring the role of social media in promoting these religious manifestations, I now move on to answer part of my third research question, by discussing the impact of this new Sufi phenomenon. Sufi organisations and religious actors use new forms of “entrepreneurial religious marketing” (Voll 2007, p.295) and technological modes of production to engage younger audiences. They are also responding to a broader social and cultural shift, which sees people coming and going in a more fluid way from religious institutions. By offering social activities and halal forms of shopping and entertainment their ‘products’ remain vibrant and adaptable, meeting the needs of their audiences, who require flexible religious engagement. This corresponds to changes within Christian institutions in Britain. Christian communities also require churches to become more professionalised and offer quality welfare services (Bäckström 2017). The
churches that are more accommodating and open their doors to both religious and social/welfare activities are flourishing; those that do little more than provide a Sunday religious service are closing (Davie et al. 2013).

The commercial attempts made by British Muslims to publicise their faith and simultaneously gather adherents to join in religious practices, through promotional and entrepreneurial strategies, is an unwitting product of capitalist culture. “British Muslims want to be known as Muslims in public as well as private life, in order that provision for their needs is met on these terms” (Davie 2015, p.42). These forms of religion can be considered both devotional and superficial (Morris 2019). Changes in religious leadership and organisational structures, show Sufi associations, like other religious institutions, are “not so much disappearing as mutating” (Davie 1994, p.198), in response to the demands of an increasingly youthful market of religious consumers143.

The role of the shaykh has bifurcated; he is now concurrently the patron of a community organisation and leader of a Sufi tariqa(s). This new responsibility allows for spiritual guidance to become more familiar and accessible to people, without austere forms of affiliation into a Sufi order (see Green 2012). As articulated in working definitions of ‘post-tariqas’, these institutions can facilitate collective learning and worship, instead of individual spiritual training with a shaykh (Hermansen 2012; Sedgwick 2016). They convey how Sufism is being “repackaged not so much as a ‘network of disciples’ but rather as a set of beliefs and practices that constitute normative Islam” (Heck 2008; Geaves 2014b, p.49). When a shaykh is physically present, he does not necessarily provide one-to-one spiritual training but rather advises on, and shares, Sufi teachings (although individual guidance can be sought after being introduced to Sufism through these institutions).

The principles of Sufism are represented through ‘spirituality’, education/sacred learning (‘ilm), Sufi poetry, the Prophetic example (Sunnah) and service to communities (khidma). This avoids controversy and sectarian disagreements that have previously divided mosques in

Britain (Geaves 1996b). Instead, these spaces help moderate factional attitudes and promote a unified approach to faith – provided the organisers are also not condemned or rejected for practicing Islam/Sufism in their own way. They also do not overtly call for attendees to accept Sufism, nor promote any one tariqa. Contemporary Sufism is contested and vibrant, uniquely conceptualised by individuals who adopt this practice. There is no singular understanding of what constitutes Sufism.

This was also portrayed through a discursive shift, not from ‘religion’ to ‘spirituality’ as suggested by some researchers (Taylor 2007; Watts 2018a), rather from ‘Sufism’ to ‘spirituality’. The terms ‘tasawwuf’ and ‘spirituality’ were used in preference of ‘Sufism’, although they were often used interchangeably, as people were referring to the same tradition, but feared the connotations that were associated with the latter:

> We want GH to expose people to the spiritual dimension of Islam, and remove misconceptions of spirituality. To show people you can be conservative in your approach and still be spiritual. A lot of times spirituality shown as liberal Islam or that you have to be liberal- religious laws don’t have to removed or ‘relaxed’ to show the spiritual side of Islam (Trustee 3, fieldnotes GH 31/07/2018).

This included critiques that it was a construct formed by orientalist scholars and considered ‘moderate’ and therefore, ‘liberal’ Islam’, due to the false dichotomy of ‘good Muslim’/’bad Muslim’, promoted by Western governments, because of an individual’s association with Sufism (Birt 2006; Muedini 2015; Sedgwick 2015).

> I don't like the word Sufism, it has a certain connotation and Sufism can also be taken up by non-Muslims, such as Western Sufism. I prefer tasawwuf for Islamic spirituality, not Sufism (Trustee 2, fieldnotes GH 31/07/2018).

The production of Sufism is in accordance with the organisers’ own understanding of this concept. Applying the term ‘tasawwuf’ allows coordinators to claim they are rooted in an authentic religious tradition, which draws upon orthodox sacred knowledge, whilst providing the parameters in which staff and their audiences can negotiate it. This can be considered a
social construct of ‘lived religion’, as discussed in the methodology chapter, whereby a person’s own engagement or way of (re)imagining faith forms part of their religious experiences (Ammerman 2013, p.278).

Religious engagement is not prescriptive, giving people the flexibility to advance at their own pace. One participant (Musa), facetiously coined the term ‘tariqa-diet’ which he used to describe Sufism without bayah and ‘added sugars’.

Shaykh Babikir doesn’t tell people to do bayah. He sends people to go and find their own tariqas and introduces them to different tariqas, e.g. advice to study this, or turn up to such a gathering, or pray such a thing. Not a ‘referral’, more to slow people down and get them to do regular actions. Shaykh Babikir just wants to push people in the right side and just take them out of trouble… People have come here and found Sufism and tariqa through interactions – with each other, performers and speakers (fieldnotes RC, 24/11/2017).

Sufi groups have also adapted to their local contexts within Western settings through acculturation, as evident through language, sartorial choices and paraphernalia (Hazen 2016; Bang 2017). Using ‘post-tariqas’ as a conceptual tool has helped frame contemporary Sufi expression. As discussed in the literature review, thus far, academic studies have made reference to this term (Hermansen 2012; Sedgwick 2016), without providing a comprehensive definition that is rooted in thorough ethnographic research. Post-tariqa expressions of Sufism have distinctive characteristics, which depart from traditional tariqas (the key hallmarks of which were discussed in Chapter Two), where followers are congregating and accessing Sufism in new ways. This warrants a new working definition, generated from the analysis of this research. I propose that we understand this term as follows:

‘Spaces outside of tariqa which may be organised by, or in the presence of a spiritual guide, where one can engage in Sufi-flavoured Islam without any exclusive commitment to events, and without the requirement to pledge allegiance to a shaykh or to follow any particular tariqa. Sufi spiritual activities are promoted, held and negotiated, with visible markers of acculturation. In this way, individuals can articulate their own understanding of Sufi practice
and identities, and/or engage in collective worship. These can be found in offline and online contexts’.

5.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have charted the different ways in which Sufism is produced, sold and expressed by religious actors. Contemporary Sufism in Britain is a “repackaging” of Sufi Islam (Altglas 2014, p.475), that is consonant with its social and religious environment. With some clear evidence for rational choice theory, the production of Sufism in my field sites are entrepreneurial, adapting their ‘supply’ according to the ‘demands’ of consumers. This fulfils a need for halal entertainment and flexible religious engagement. As the Internet and social media features evolve, Sufism also takes many forms online (Bunt 2018), from private mosque and tariqa-based congregations, to live mawlid and dhikr gatherings. As people share more of their lives on the Internet, they also provide insights into their religious views and practices. These transformations can impact religious authority, changing the dynamic of the shaykh-mureed relationship and one’s access to tariqa practices.

As discussed in the literature review, by exploring the production of Sufi activities that are not ‘official’ or ‘institutional’ (see Jeldtoft 2011), and are found in private spaces, such as the home (Woodhead 2010), this helps to counter their ‘invisibility’ (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Analysing these forms of contemporary Sufi expression helps our understanding of lived religion and post-tariqa movements. In the following chapter, I will discuss the consumption and commercialisation of Sufi practice and how this enables practices of bricolage and individualistic approaches to faith.
Chapter Six – The Consumption of Sufism

6.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I analysed the different ways religious actors and Sufi communal organisations play a central role in redefining religious-cultural production. These new spaces, including the online realm, provide alternative forms of communal belonging and spiritual engagement for their audiences. This challenges arguments made by previous scholars who believed, “‘post-tariqa’ expression is more commonly popular among the immigrant and diaspora communities, and has not found a broader reception than that of other mosques or da’wa organisations” (Bennett and Ramsey 2012, p.290).

I now examine the reception and consumption of contemporary Sufism in Britain placing an emphasis on those who ‘consume’ what is produced. My observational data indicates participants’ age, gender and ethnicity. This enables some assessment of the types of people who engage with Sufism in offline and online spaces, and how these demographic factors influence and nurture their social and spiritual lives. I also discuss the ways Muslims may ‘consume’ religion and spirituality, by creating individualistic tools for accessing and negotiating faith through virtually joining gatherings, streaming Islamic music, purchasing Sufi paraphernalia and searching for religious authorities who understand their social experiences. In the literature review, I explored how contemporary religion is embedded in consumer society. In this chapter, I use the concepts of religious individualism and bricolage to help explain some of my observations. Young Muslims engage in both an individualistic and collective spiritual journey, by finding their own religious pathway in relation to their lived experiences in Britain (Geaves 2014b). Bricolage emphasises personal choice and enables people to shape their own identities (Altglas 2014a), but as part of a collective endeavour shared with others.

Consumerism “is the active ideology that the meaning of life is to be found in buying things and pre-packaged experiences” (Bocock 1993, p.50). It is also a construction and reflection of identities, ‘I am, what I buy’. As discussed in the literature review, mass production and consumption are a key feature of modern societies, that have been amplified through media
communications such as the television, radio and Internet. The marketing and aesthetics of products and services promotes consumption. Most people engage in these processes, whether consciously or unconsciously in their lifestyle and entertainment choices and purchase of food, clothing and goods. These are usually undertaken according to individual tastes and preferences (Featherstone 1991; Altglas 2014b), but also against the background of social and peer-group assumptions about ‘what counts’ as ‘cool’ or of ‘good taste’.

I propose contemporary Sufi movements in the UK are embedded within a consumer society, which have led to new forms of religious organisation and changes in religious participation. Features of the market model religious economy (Finke and Stark 1992) can be seen in the ways Sufism is promoted and reconstructed through commercial enterprises (see Chapter Five). As shown in previous research, consumption is a vehicle for experiencing the sacred; consumer behaviour processes can be seen in: sacralisation (rituals, gift-giving, adding sacred meanings to products/secular activities), perpetuation of sacredness (by separating the sacred and profane, relics) and desacralisation (lack of separation between the sacred and profane) (Belk et al. 1989; Rinallo et al. 2012, p.7).

Sacralisation, or making Islamic (‘Islamicising’), everyday experiences (watching movies, playing sports) creates avenues for religious consumption as it provides an entertaining, convenient way of becoming more spiritual. The provision of advice and services that resolve young Muslims’ social struggles [e.g. insufficient facilities in mosques, the marriage crisis (Ahmad 2017)], directs regular visitors towards Sufi-inspired organisations, who feel supported in a quasi-religious structure. Collectively, they fill a gap in both the halal British entertainment industry and current religious infrastructures.

### 6.1 Offline audiences

In order to answer my third research question, on what the new Sufi phenomenon tells us about religious engagement amongst young British Muslims I explore the audiences, to see who are the main consumers. RC and GH attract an intergenerational audience, with young\(^\text{144}\) attendees as the majority. The high number of attendees from a young demographic is not

\(^{144}\) Ages 18-35.
surprising, as they comprise of over half of the British Muslim population (Gilliat-Ray 2010, p.121); therefore (newer) religious institutions are compelled to meet their demands. Based on my informal conversations during fieldwork, it was clear that many of them are educated professionals and students, perhaps due to the proximity of the centres to local universities. This is indicative of social class as mentioned by one member of staff:

There’s a dichotomy between ‘bourgeoisie’ and ‘road’ Islam, that is the difference between professionals, and uneducated Muslims. Many of those who visit Rumi’s are of a middle-class background. Their academic education makes it easier for them to have intellectual conversations on Islam, and hold discussions which are respectful, even when controversial (paraphrased fieldnotes, RC 24/11/2017).

As discussed in Chapter Five, religious producers evaluate their clientele and adapt their services and spaces accordingly. Therefore, these new faith-based welfare organisations bring together young people who experience a similar spectrum of social issues. The consumers thus make ‘choices’ in their selection of the services offered by the centres (Finke and Stark 1998). For instance, I was informed that most young attendees at RC are between the ages 24-30, as this is the ‘eligible bachelor age’. As societal and family pressures for marriage increase, some people within this age range attend events to search for a suitable (and compatible) spouse. This was also reflected in some of the conversations I had with attendees, who were conscious about how they looked or who they spoke to, as they were considering meeting potential partners.

One of the participants asked me if I knew of any marriage organisations, because his friend was looking to get married (pointing to the person next to him). On hearing this his friend laughed nervously and said “yes that’s me”...I was confused as to why I was the only one he asked this question (fieldnotes, RC 11/11/2017).

Some people attend to get married at Rumi’s, there’s a pressure from don’t get married, to get married when you’re aged 24-30...People have met their spouses from volunteering,
events and retreats. [Rumi’s is a] safe space to meet someone as you can speak to each other in an open space without fear or pressure of a *rishta*\(^{145}\) (fieldnotes, RC 24/11/2017).

I might meet my future husband, so I need to look nice (fieldnotes, RC 25/11/2017).

At GH, as events are segregated, it is often difficult for someone to approach a marriage prospect. Some young attendees occasionally discussed their desire to get married amongst themselves or with members of staff, who directed them to ‘Sacred Vows’, a Shariah compliant marriage service co-founded by a female trustee at GH. This confirms findings from Ahmad (2017) that young Muslims want the agency to find a marriage prospect within religious confines, as their faith and changing attitudes towards marriage in their social contexts takes precedence – even if this goes against parental cultural norms.

![Sacred Vows stall advertised at GH for people to purchase a discounted annual membership for marital match-making](Source: Author Photo, 2018).

**Figure 77: Sacred Vows stall advertised at GH for people to purchase a discounted annual membership for marital match-making (Source: Author Photo, 2018).**

6.1.1 Gender interactions

In the previous chapter, I described the contrasting religious views between RC and GH on the provision of gender segregated activities. One member of staff told me Shaykh Babikir refrains from promoting women-only circles as the organisation is ‘open to everyone’ and he

\(^{145}\) A ‘*rishta*’ is a formal request for an arranged marriage in South Asian households.
aims to make attendees feel welcome, especially those who are not devout (fieldnotes RC, 24/11/2017). I now move on to discuss the impact of this on religious consumers at RC, who were conflicted between wanting to attain the spiritual benefits of religious gatherings, whilst upholding their jurisprudential beliefs. Here is one example:

Often the main room would become so full, there was no space to accommodate for gender segregation during congregational prayers. In order to pray their *salah* on time, men and women felt obliged to pray besides one other in the narrow room towards the back of the venue. One attendee shared how this can hinder her attendance at Rumi’s, as she expects there will be overcrowding, which irritates her. She became flustered as the room was quite hot and spoke of how this also impacted her spirituality, as she was attending the event to seek knowledge but because of the crowded space she “ends up touching the opposite gender” during *salah*. On hearing this, the lady next to her responded with empathy whilst replying “there is more blessing praying in congregation” (excerpt fieldnotes, RC, 11/11/2017).

Gender interactions within the venue are not representative of each attendee’s personal religious outlook. For example, some men and women were sat next to each other because gender segregation was not already made available. For some people, gender segregation was more than not sitting next to the opposite sex – it was also in their approach, mannerisms and communication, by only speaking when necessary and not forming acquaintances. During collective recitations of Qur’an and *dhikr*, many women mimed, whispered or prayed quietly to themselves or waited for the room to be clear to pray *salah* on their own and away from the men. The purpose behind these actions were indicative of modesty and shyness, which some regards as Islamic virtues (Lewis 2013).
In ethnographic research, individuals’ words and actions can be analysed, but not their internal intentions. However, in Sufi principles, the intention is just as, if not more important than the action itself (Sedgwick 2003, p.53). Intentions can sometimes be shown through outward practice(s) and external actions can also configure internal intentions (see Asad 1993). The significance of intention can be seen in the observations of gender interactions at RC. Outwardly, some critics perceive them as engaging in unlawful, ‘liberal’, or incorrect practice; however, participants have shared different reasons why men and women are seated together: shortage of space, allowing people who are not so religious to participate in gatherings and accommodating for differences in religious understanding (see Chapter Five, Section 5.3). The different ways attendees impose limitations on themselves, via ways of communication or by praying separately, is their personal approach to act in accordance with their own religious views, without disrupting the gathering. This shows that refining one’s intention before carrying out any action, whilst ensuring it conforms with your individual religious beliefs, is way of reconstructing an internal Sufi practice.

6.1.2 Cultural diversity: Ethnicity
During events at RC, the audiences are comprised of people from varied ethnic backgrounds, including many people who belong to hybrid cultural backgrounds – as their families are of different ethnic communities. Amongst the attendees at GH there is a British-Pakistani majority, which is also reflected in leadership and volunteers. Both centres may be considered ‘post-ethnic’ spaces (Sedgwick 2016), promoting cultural diversity as their Sufi engagement is not bound by cultural ethnic practices. Most of the events draw upon a globalised Muslim culture and the needs of the worldwide Muslim communities (‘the Ummah’) (see Geaves 2014).

My mother is from Pakistan, my father is from Sudan (fieldnotes RC, 17/12/2017).

The attendees were all female and from diverse backgrounds and ethnicities (fieldnotes RC, 24/10/2017).

There was a diverse audience but most women seemed to be of Pakistani ethnic origin and/or South Asian. The speaker also made reference to this during his speech that “most of you will be Hanafi because of your South Asian origin”. The speaker himself was not South Asian, and seemed to be of Arab/Middle Eastern descent. Ladies all wearing abayas and shalwar kameez, none had worn ‘western’ style clothing (fieldnotes GH, 20/05/2018).

GH attracts more South Asian followers because the main organisers belong to that background. They (staff at GH) mentioned Rumis has more of a diverse following because the organisers themselves are of different ethnic backgrounds\(^\text{146}\) (fieldnotes GH, 31/07/2017).

As discussed in Chapter Two, Section 2.3, Sufi groups are now more ethnically diverse as a result of the efforts by second and third generation Muslims, who have invested in new institutions for the training and education of young Muslims in Islamic/Sufi disciplines, in the English language (Geaves 2000; Geaves 2016). Thus, as considered in the literature review, the cultural dimensions that shape young Muslims identities can be best comprehended

through the conceptual lens of ‘super-diversity’ (Vertovec 2014). This provides a nuanced way of understanding different social interactions and considers the varied ethnic, linguistic and religious factors that condition people’s lives (Vertovec 2007; Meissner and Vertovec 2015). Many of the British-born attendees attempt to merge their syncretic national, ethnic and religious identities, which are reflected in their sartorial choices and communication styles.

6.1.3 Dresswear

Young Muslims’ selection of dresswear reflect cultural and religious influences, that were informed by their negotiation of parental traditions, trending fashion styles on social media and their own understanding of modesty and piety through religious scripture (Lewis 2013; Lewis 2015; Lewis et al. 2016). For instance, attendees would wear Western apparel paired with religious clothing or they wore ethnic clothing alongside religious attire (e.g. wearing hijab with shalwar kameez).

Hijab- different styles, e.g. some were showing earrings...most people wore western clothing (top and jeans/trousers). Someone wore a tally counter for dhikr as a ring! (fieldnotes RC, 26/11/2017).

Cultural clothing was diverse and usually reflective of the individuals’ ethnic background. For many women, even their hijab styles and the ways of head covering indicated cultural influences or reflect their religious understanding of modesty. For example, some people of a Pakistani background would wear a loose dupatta or chaadar on their head. Others wore the hijab in a turban style, showing parts of their hair and their neck, which followed a trend created by British Muslim YouTube influencers, who were promoting a new understanding of fashion and (religious) modesty (see Figure 79). Even amongst the men during prayer, many choose to wear Western apparel over a religious or ethnic attire.

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147 Clothing from Western brands, marketers and designers.
148 South Asian clothes, usually comprised of loose fitting trousers and a long dress.
149 A piece of loose material usually worn with shalwar kameez to cover the head and chest.
150 A thicker traditional shawl usually worn with shalwar kameez to cover the head and chest.
The reciter of the khutba and leader of prayer didn’t wear a topi\textsuperscript{151}. He wore ‘western’ style clothing—trousers, shirt, jumper. None of the younger men who came for prayer wore topis, they mostly wore trousers and shirts or jeans and a shirt. Only one wore a long thawb\textsuperscript{152} (fieldnotes RC Jum’ah prayers, 27/10/2017).

Some women were wearing a headscarf...some were wearing it loosely over their head (fieldnotes RC, 11/11/2017).

All female class, everyone was wearing a hijab. Some were pairing hijab with abaya\textsuperscript{153}, shalwar kameez, leggings and a dress/top (fieldnotes GH ladies tajweed class, 20/06/2018).

One lady had a large tasbih around her neck, another had wrapped it around her wrist. Some wore hijab out of respect, claiming they don’t usually wear it (fieldnotes Rumi’s, 11/11/2017).

One lady sat in Jumah prayer without hijab (fieldnotes Rumi’s, 24/11/2017).

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure79.png}
\caption{Turban style hijab, as promoted by social media influencer and British Muslim vlogger Dina Torkia, also known as Dina Tokio (Source: Dina Tokio, book ‘Modestly’).}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{151} Hat worn for sacred purposes.
\textsuperscript{152} An ankle-length garment with long sleeves for men.
\textsuperscript{153} An ankle-length garment with long sleeves for women.
Clothing is a unique way of expressing multiple identities, and creating new trends in faith and fashion, blending elements of their religion, culture and ethnicity (see Lewis 2015).

6.1.4 Language

The use of languages amongst audiences are also indicative of hybridised identities. Here are some examples:

That’s a nice sheh [meaning ‘thing’ in Punajbi], (fieldnotes GH ladies intermediate tajweed course, 20/06/2018)

Come over here aaja, aaja [‘come, come’ in Urdu], (fieldnotes GH sisters retreat, 05/08/2018)

Although English is the predominant lingua franca, ethnic languages were often used as sentence fillers. Similarly, an English suffix would be added to words in other languages and religious jargon, to generate new vocabulary, such as ‘Hadithy’ (fieldnotes RC, 26/11/2017). In addition to this, tajweed classes were arranged, for students to learn recite the Qur’an in Arabic with proficiency. At GH, the teachers tailor their methods to cater for the majority Pakistani attendees who had (incorrectly) learnt to recite Arabic through a Pakistani dialect. Students are assisted during the class by the instructor comparing Arabic with the Urdu language:

This is a common sound misread by Pakistanis...When we have a Shaykh we do ‘behyt’, isn’t it ‘bay’ah’...this is for only some of you...it’s okay in case of you aren’t inclined that way (fieldnotes GH ladies intermediate tajweed course, 20/06/2018).

In the example above, the course tutor drew on Sufi teachings of spiritual initiation, to correct people’s vocabulary, whilst acknowledging intrareligious divergences. The organisers have also recognised that many young Muslims were taught Arabic by first and second generation migrants, who had mispronounced words in their distinctive accents.
Many young Muslims, including events facilitators, spoke in a colloquial vernacular, using conversational language to remain casual and informal.

Our *homeboy* from Rumi’s Cave (fieldnotes RC, 27/10/2017).

Continue revising, “*buckle down*” and continue practicing. Tajweed is a science you can’t *fluke*, requires individual effort” (fieldnotes GH, 20/06/2018).

Syncretic identities are evidenced in the use of language, conveying multiple cultural and social influences. The teachers at these centres recognised that in order to appeal to their younger audiences, they had to engage with them in a way that they could relate to. The impact of sociolinguistics will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter when discussing virtual audiences, through an exploration of online communication styles (Section 6.6).

**6.2 Consumer choice: reviving Sufism**

In the previous chapter, I explored the new ways Sufism is produced to engage young Muslim audiences. Organisations like RC and GH enable people to practice religion in their own way, whilst reinforcing engagement in collective traditions and transferring orthodox and authentic religious knowledge. This is both individualistic, and provides communal belonging.

Having outlined the diversity amongst audiences, it is important to acknowledge the multiplicity of young people’s engagement with Islam and Sufism, as there is no singular youth experience. For some young Muslims participating in Sufism by attending faith-based welfare centres or seeking Sufi commercial activities, is nothing but a social pursuit, to adopt a hobby, learn a new skill or meet other likeminded Muslims. For others, it is deeply embedded in their religious lifestyle, that allows them to increase their association with Islam, in a way that aligns with both their personal interests and Islamic principles. During a conversation one trustee at GH told me,

*Some attendees are focused on a particular class or activity and may not attend regularly. The might be here just for sports or for social gatherings etc and therefore don’t consider the Sufi
element when deciding to come to events. For others, GH validates they’re on the right path and they are happy that GH is associated to a *tariqa* (paraphrased fieldnote GH, 31/07/2018).

Similarly, at RC a manager shared,

> There are some Sufis at Rumis but there are a lot of people who “aren’t about that life” (verbatim quote meaning, who are not interested)\(^{154}\). Salafis may attend because they like poetry and the atmosphere at Rumis. Non-Muslims attend events and are regular attendees. People who don’t even understand Sufism also come here to enjoy themselves (paraphrased fieldnotes, 24/11/2017).

This confirms earlier findings that young Muslims ‘live’ Islam in different ways, which is expressed by their differing “tastes and individualised levels of personal piety and public practice” (Hamid 2011, p.3).

The attendees were citing different reasons for coming to the retreat: needing a break from emotional burdens, physical fitness, spiritual benefits and so on (fieldnotes, GH sisters retreat 05/08/2018).

For both offline and online consumers, religion is increasingly becoming a social pursuit (Voas and Crockett 2005, p.14). Aesthetically pleasing online and offline marketing techniques appeal to young consumers who can access faith-based organisations beyond their localities. These advertising mechanisms convey opportunities to engage in social and religious activities as convenient, exciting and fun. The options for consumers are manifold, just as they would be in the marketplace (Finke et al. 1996; Finke and Stark 1998).

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\(^{154}\) This conveys the use of informal language amongst young members of staff and attendees.
Davie (2005, p.291) coined the phrase ‘from obligation to consumption’ to account for the ways people of faith no longer engage in religious activities because they have a sense of duty.
or have inherited religious traditions, but do so willingly. How young Muslim’s engagement with new these new Sufi forms are ‘beyond obligation, to consumption’. Many young British Muslims are still observing aspects of their faith, but they now have more awareness and agency about the options to reconstruct inherited social, religious and cultural traditions in innovative ways. They do not have to create or participate in alternative modes of religious expression but may choose to in order to preserve their faith. This does come with an element of recreational enjoyment and entertainment. The incentives to ‘opt in’ to faith as a leisure activity or to find a spouse, diminishes a sense of requirement or duty, and appears to increase attendance and participation (Davie 1994; Davie 2005; Davie 2015).

Sufi practice has (inevitably) changed in its encounter with modernisation, Western environments and changing patterns of individual religiosity (Genn 2007, p.257). It is important to consider the different variables that shape young people’s changes in religious attitudes, including their social-religious setting, the transmission of faith, the Internet as a place of religious information and the role of new faith-based institutions. Religious consumers engage in a form of ‘pick and mix’ religion by constructing personal packages “based on individual tastes and preferences” (Houtman and Aupers 2010, p.5; Woodhead 2010). Following a conversation with a participant at RC, I noted what he shared with me in my fieldwork diary.

Coming to the events at Rumi’s made him more religious and spiritual, but it was complimented with other religious classes, as well as the Internet (paraphrased fieldnotes RC, 02/12/2017).

As discussed in the previous chapter, this agency in their religious choices results in ‘selective belonging’. The producers have allowed young Muslims to follow their personal spiritual quest in a controlled environment- that is overseen by Sufi guides and scholars – which provides them with the agency to choose the activities they wish to engage in. This was received positively by some participants,
She believed the youth are reviving Sufism, and organisations like GH are useful for hosting events which are inspired by Sufism and have a Sufi Shaykh (Muhammad Al Yaqoubi) as its patron (paraphrased fieldnotes GH, 20/06/2018).

This confirms findings that if existing religious organisations fail to meet their demands, young Muslims will create their own platforms and avant-garde entrepreneurial spiritual avenues to diversify the existing religious landscape (Hamid 2016, p.110). From a social constructionist perspective, today young people are not constrained by traditional societal expectations, rather they have too many choices and decisions to make about who they are and want to be, which results in individualisation for some (Giddens 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Collins-Mayo 2016). I will return to this concept of individualism later on this chapter when discussing how some participants apply practices of bricolage.

6.3 Commercialisation of Islamic music via naat khwaani

As discussed in Chapter Five, religious producers online also create commercial enterprises based on their consumers’ demands. I now explore the consumer dimensions of Sufism online, which will also answer my first and second research questions on the current forms of Sufi expression and the role of social media in these contexts. The table below numerically indicates the number of people who view naats online.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reciter</th>
<th>Videos</th>
<th>Subscribers</th>
<th>Views</th>
<th>Viewer-subscriber ratio</th>
<th>Average views per video</th>
<th>Total no. of Facebook followers</th>
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<td>10900</td>
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<td>1865100</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>19800</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>36700</td>
<td>5750200</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>54800</td>
<td>31000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1030000</td>
<td>24634000</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>3973200</td>
<td>290000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 82: Number of views, online subscribers and followers of naat khwaans in this study on Facebook and YouTube. Subscribers, views and followers have been rounded to the nearest 100 (Source: Author, Dec 2019).*

These figures cannot precisely depict the extent of their popularity as online figures are constantly fluctuating as people join and leave these networks. The numbers of views are
constantly increasing, and the reciters are also active on other social media platforms, such as Snapchat, Twitter and Instagram. Their videos have also been uploaded by other users (fans), which have generated tens and hundreds of thousands of views. Some users may have followed them on both sets of social media profiles, but it is impossible to determine the exact figure.

Naat khwaans are vanguards of social and religious change online, as they introduce new and convenient ways of consuming Sufism. Amongst the reciters in my study, the most popular reciter had over 1,000,000 subscribers on his YouTube channel, and an average following of 290,000 on Facebook. In total, his videos on YouTube alone had been viewed over 240,000,000 times. His most popular video generated 96,000,000 views. The least popular reciter had just over 3,000 subscribers on YouTube, and under 11,000 followers on Facebook. In total, his YouTube videos had just over 500,000 views and his most popular video had 39,000 views. The viewer to subscriber ratio in the table above is a measure of popularity. A low viewer subscriber ratio indicates popularity, whereas a high ratio implies lower popularity. For example, if a channel has 10,000,000 views but only 10 subscribers, it implies that viewers are not subscribing after watching a video. Facebook followers includes following on personal accounts and ‘likes’ on public profiles.

Religion requires not only a set of ideas, it requires communal experience – emotions that arise when people come together to pray, sing and perform rituals (Brekke 2016, p.32). To enhance their earnings, the reciters fulfil a consumer demand – to retain audience engagement by delivering an animated performance. This is conveyed through the repetition of words and phrases and the recital of complex raags, which is euphonious but has no religious purpose. Their performance styles are characteristic of commercial entertainment. Through these platforms, spiritual practices, services and experiences, are commercialised and consumed (Rinallo et al. 2012).

One example is the annual ‘Open Call’ festivals in Alexandra Park, Oldham as I have mentioned earlier. This event has been running since 2015 and has attracted over one hundred thousand
visitors, including the local mayor, politicians, *ulama*, charity officials, *nasheed* and creative artists. This religious festival is organised by the managers of the Sufi-inspired charity organisation, Greengate Trust and youth *naat khwaans*. The Open Call has focused on Islamic and Muslim culture to promote “peace, love and harmony”. It has replaced the annual Oldham *mela* which promoted South Asian culture, which itself supplanted the local Oldham carnival. These commercial events convey a shift from ethnicity to religion (Asad 1990; Bauman 1999; Modood 2010) and the demands of young Muslim consumers. It also supports the claim that these performances fulfil the consumer demand for halal forms of entertainment, where popular culture fails them (Morris 2017b).

*Mehfils*, in which *naat* assemblies take place are also a source of production and consumption for halal enterprises and the exchange of goods. Many gatherings are sponsored by local businesses, including: restaurants and takeaways providing free food (*langar*), travel agents giving away Umrah tickets as raffle prizes to help raise money for charitable causes, recording

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155 According to their website, [http://theopencall.co.uk/](http://theopencall.co.uk/) <last accessed 26/05/2019>.
156 [http://theopencall.co.uk/](http://theopencall.co.uk/)
companies lending sounds systems, and, finally YouTube account holders livestreaming the events and editing videos as bitesize clips.

The host began praising all those who helped sponsor the mehfil (in Punjabi), by mentioning the names of the people and organisations, including those who donated food, Umrah tickets as raffle prizes, provided sound systems and ran the YouTube account for live-streaming. He then mentioned that this donated langar will be served after the mehfil (fieldnotes online research, livestream mehfil 2017).

![Figure 84: YQNC thanking and praying for blessings for a local business (anonymised) on Facebook for their sponsorship.](image)

These commercial enterprises are mostly founded by Muslims in Britain, many of whom are sympathetic or aligned with the Barelvi tradition (Geaves 2000; Geaves 2016), providing the finances and resources to support the gathering. In exchange they receive social and spiritual capital, by being openly acknowledged and thanked for their services and receiving prayers and sacred value (Geaves 2016).

### 6.4 Online audiences

Through marketing techniques on the Internet, consumers have more awareness of different religious opportunities that they can access in a nearby city, or from the comfort of their homes (see Chapters Two and Five). Based on my case studies, buyers of Sufi paraphernalia and naat listeners on social media, comprised intergenerational, national and international audiences. The (young) age, cultural backgrounds (British-Pakistani) and religious leanings of the reciters (Ahl as-Sunnah) means most of their online engagement comes from people from a similar demographic. Nonetheless, as most of the content is on a global platform, there are
varied audiences, connecting people from different ages, ethnicities and religious denominations\textsuperscript{157}.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|}
\hline
salam from mauritius \\
MASHALLAH \\
Salan all the way from high Wycombe \\
Mashallah \\
MashaAllah \\
SubhanAllah \\
Ok brother I love mawild brother down to Letter \\
MashaAllah Nawaz frome India.. \\
HAQ!
SubhanAllah SubhanAllah \\
Nice \\
Feeling the atmosphere absolutely electrifying!!!!! \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Facebook comments generated by NVivo, users sharing their location (Source: NVivo).}
\end{table}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|
\hline
Total respect from Ireland lads. \\
I know a few Muslim men ... they r kind .... and loving parents .... they help anyone they can .... I have nothing but love and respect x \\
Load of bull you no who the bad ones are turn them in or sort them out \\
what race is islam? \\
my house will never have a Muslim in it no way no fucking chance. Islam is backwards \\
\hline
Reference 4791: 0.01\% coverage \\
Reference 4792: 0.01\% coverage \\
Reference 4793: 0.01\% coverage \\
Reference 4794: 0.01\% coverage \\
\end{tabular}
\caption{Facebook comments to a naat khwaan from non-Muslim users (Source: NVivo).}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{157} Audience data cannot be evidenced due to ethics of anonymity, however this analysis is generated from both NVivo and ‘direct analysis’ netnography.
The host discussed the virtues of the Quran in English and Urdu. He explicitly distinguishes between the ‘buzurg’ and ‘nawjawaan’ i.e. the young and old (to cater for both age ranges), fieldnotes online research, livestream mehfil (2017).

Many online followers idolise naat khwaans based on their social media personas. The reciters wear luxury designer clothing and accessories, are well groomed with fashionable haircuts and styled beards, and drive expensive cars (both owned and hired).

Mshallah brother how did u cut ur hair

love the number plate

-Facebook comments from users

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158 Photo screenshotted from the Open Call 2016 event, livestreamed and uploaded on YouTube. Faces blurred for anonymity.
Thus, many reciters are considered ‘ideal’ marriage candidates. Women express their interest through a myriad of comments and emoticons. Some comments had religious undertones, as to not appear too presumptuous, such as, “MashAllah”, “May Allah bless you” and green love heart emoticons\textsuperscript{159}.

Allah SWT beautiful creation. Mashallah 😊

Posing lol

Ma shaa Allah ❤️

I wanna marry you

Gorgeous xxx

❤️❤️❤️❤️

\textsuperscript{159} The colour green has religious connotations as it is associated with Paradise and the Green dome of the Prophet’s mosque in Madinah.

This was not always well-received by other users, particularly male audiences:

u got girls on your profile now that doesn’t make u a good Muslim

The new FB celeb


Naat khwaani on social media helps the authentic textual transmission and memorisation of Sufi poetry in their original languages. Naat khwaans are exemplars for younger children (from ages five to fifteen), who emulate their practices. They attend their mehfilis, reciting naats alongside them on stage, enrol onto naat lessons hosted by the reciters and request ‘meet and greet’ after events to take photographs.

A young child (who seems under the age of 12) is reciting a naat whilst looking at the lyrics on the phone that is in his hand...the host of the mehfil says: this credit goes to their teachers MashAllah, their families who nurture and educate their children in such a manner that they grow up singing the praises of the praised one S.A.W and SubhanAllah what amazing role models we have here who these children look up to (points to the popular young British naat khwaans on stage), fieldnotes online research, livestream mehfil (2017).

Jazaakallah to you all for engaging and encouraging the youngsters of the next generation my son is inspired by you all

Figure 90: Facebook comment sourced by NVivo.

Figure 91: Facebook comment to a naat khwaan requesting photographs, sourced by NVivo.
Islamic/Sufi music helps create an emotional experience with faith and a strong sense of identity amongst young Muslims (Jafari and Sandikci 2016). For listeners, naat eulogies to the Prophet are ‘consumed’ as a way of invoking barakah and his mediatory presence and intercession (shafa’a), believing this innovative way of dhikr helps them to accumulate spiritual merit (thawaab) (Eisenlohr 2009). The significance of this has been evidenced in previous research,

“Given the central symbolic function of music in contemporary consumer culture, the different uses of music and their appropriateness in religious terms are particularly relevant for questions concerning competing definitions of modernity and morality in the public sphere” (Abenante 2017, p.142).

During my observations of livestreamed religious gatherings, it could be seen that the number of online viewers were often substantially more than the number of ‘in person’ attendees.

441 people watching at 22.00pm. 534 at 22.09. 624 at 22.35. This number then dropped to 292 by 22.48pm and then increased to 595 by 22.51, which shows people were watching the live mehfil ‘on and off’. When the camera flipped to audience the room seemed almost

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Figure 92: Young children crowded in front of the stage at the Open Call (2016) event (Source: YouTube).

160 Photo screenshotted from the Open Call 2016 event.
completely full. The very next day the total number of views from the gathering were 14,687 (Excerpt fieldnotes observed during the livestream mehfil, Rabi ul Awwal (2017).

In contrast to previous research (Campbell 2005), I found on-screen worship does not result in an absence of physical attendance; however the convenience of accessing religion from any place may result in a gradual decline. One explanation as to why the number of online views are higher is the participation of female audiences and international observers, who are sometimes restricted to access events in person, but can engage in virtual gatherings.

6.5 Sufism online

The Internet provides ways of forming new connections and alternating between different religious groups and denominations (Campbell and Garner 2016, pp.11-13). An individual’s access to religion online empowers and informs their religious decisions, as they can access faith beyond their communities and form new translocal and transglobal networks. Many people were accessing Sufism online, mostly through their mobile phones, and were also ‘posting’ Sufism on social media. They also used handheld devices for religious exchange, such as to take notes and pictures of the course material, for their personal record.

He had first noticed them (Rumi’s) on Facebook, as people were ‘inviting’ him to events (fieldnotes RC, 02/12/2017).

Everyone was on their mobile phones after engaging in initial conversations, connecting to the venue’s free Wi-Fi (fieldnotes RC, 25/10/2017).

Someone arrived early doing dhikr on their tasbeeh, another person was using their phone (fieldnotes RC, 24/11/2017).

During the lesson, someone was taking pictures of their course material to place on Snapchat—showing spiritual activity on social media. Sharing a personal experience on to a public platform, from a private institution to a shared space (fieldnotes GH, 31/07/2018).

\[161\] As discussed in the previous chapter, events posted online can be shared by other Facebook users, which is sometimes referred to as an ‘invitation’.
Event coordinators were also seen updating the organisations’ social media accounts and reading notes from their mobile phones, including the leader of the Friday sermon during congregational prayer!

The *khutba* was read by an attendee at *Jum’ah* prayer who had volunteered to do so, (this alternates each week – not an Imam). The man was reading the sermon off his mobile phone and it was livestreamed on an iPad by the managers at Rumis (fieldnotes RC, 27/10/2017).

During the car journey the female teacher asked me to take pictures of the convoy for their Snapchat (social networking) account. I took the pictures and sent them to her on WhatsApp so she could upload these at her own convenience (fieldnotes GH, 05/08/2018).

As discussed in the literature review, consumers can take religious knowledge from multiple sources and institutions (Dessing et al. 2013). There is now a proliferation of people who claim to be a religious authority and who are not religious scholars (Bunt 2018), yet they play an increasingly visible role in defining religion in the public space (Voll 2007). Virtual gatherings and other livestreamed events, allow offline and online religious activities to become integrated, creating ‘digital religion’ (Campbell 2012, p.4), as they simultaneously gather ‘real’ and ‘live’ audiences. This was evidenced in my netnographic fieldwork:

People in the audience recording videos/taking pictures on their phone (fieldnotes online research, Islamic conference 2017).

*Durood* and *Salaat o Salaam* was recited at the end of the *mehfil*. Usually everyone stands and lowers heads, but some people were taking videos on their phones including ‘selfie style’ videos of themselves next to the naat reciter whilst miming the naat with him (fieldnotes online research, *mehfil* 18/12/2017).

Quite a few *naat khwaans* were reciting *naats* by looking at their mobile phone for the lyrics (fieldnotes online research).

The senior reciter from Pakistan was also looking at *naat* lyrics on his mobile phone at one point (borrowing ideas from U.K. reciters?), (fieldnotes online research, *mehfil* 18/12/2017).
As shown in earlier research, many people multitask whilst engaging in on-screen activity (Campbell 2012). In this context, principles of niyyah and correct etiquette (adab) are emphasised by religious authorities (such as, ulama and pirs who lead naat mehfilis), as to fully receive the spiritual benefits of a gathering, offline and online audiences must adhere to the appropriate standards of adab in listening and participation.

We shouldn’t jump up and move and dance- none of this. Sit with adab and listen to the naat sharif. If you appreciate and like say SubhanAllah, if you don’t stay quiet and listen (fieldnotes online research, mehfil 18/12/2017).

We should always maintain adab in these gatherings.

(fieldnotes online research, speech by the ulama Islamic conference 2, 30/12/2017).

Naat khwaans have had to respond to the advice given by ulama on the rules of religious participation, for example,

It has been highlighted that the free-mixing and shouting ‘make some noise’ comment was out of order. I sincerely apologise and pray that Allah forgives me. I would like to thank the ulama who have guided us youngsters and encouraged us to come forward and apologise publicly (Abbreviated version of the public Facebook status update by a prominent young reciter following from the Nasheed Festival in Bradford, 2017).

Based on my findings of online Sufi activities, I argue the modalities of accessing religion online may impact religious authority and the formation of spiritual networks. For some people, attendance in virtual mehfilis or other live religious gatherings may impact Sufi principles of receiving blessings (barakah) and virtues (faiz) from a shaykh, due to a lack of active participation and unfocused attention. For other users, this may help them to form a spiritual network, beyond the restrictions of gender and physical space, as it provides them some form of proximity to religious communities (see Campbell 2005).
6.6 Online critics

Despite the accomplishments of many young *naat khwaans*, there remains a fear amongst some Barelvi Muslims that some of their practices are, ironically, causing young Muslims to lose their allegiance to their *aqida*. Some of the *ulama* believe young people are choosing to recite *naats*, rather than studying the religious sciences (*dars-i-nizaami*). This is largely due to the vast amounts of money earned by celebrity *naat* reciters, both during the booking process and from money gifted during gatherings, a customary South Asian tradition in Sufi musical (*sema*) and *mehfils*.

If we want to do *tarbiyah* (character training) we should sit with the event organisers. He gave example that within this *mehfil* someone wanted to throw money, but the organisers advised him not to and if he wanted to give, then to hand them the money and not throw it. If the poor were to see this they would think they have no *qadar* (value) for it.

He told the audience that the organisers achievement is that they’ve brought so many youngsters to the house of God (the mosque). He then went on to say, ‘you’ve come because you want to listen to the *naat shareef* but along with this you’ve also received education, you’ve learnt about the *deen* (religion), without *‘ilm* there’s nothing. Our *aqida* is Ahle Sunnah wal Jamah.

He gave advice (naseeha) to hide your good deeds, just as you hide your sins. Don’t do things for people to be impressed.

Urdu speech by elderly gentleman who is amongst the *ulama*. Tell the *naat khwaans* not to just recite for people to listen, but to also [sit and] listen [in the gathering] as well. He said their style is just as he has seen in Pakistan with *naat khwaans*, sitting and reciting a *naat* and then leaving the *mehfil* with no ‘*tarbiyat*’- teaching on behaviour and character

(fieldnotes online research speeches by the *ulama*, Islamic conference, 2017).

This conveys inter-rivalry and intrareligious differences amongst Sufi groups (Hamid 2016). The Youth Quran Naat Council (YQNC) help manage these conflicts when training young *naat khwaans*:
“We provide a Free of Charge Service to all. No one is contracted to YQNC. Whenever individuals feel that they can no longer benefit from YQNC they are free to leave the platform. We provide Naat Khawans to event organisers on a demand basis. We are not influenced or directed by any other senior Naat Khawans, However, take regular advice from various scholars on issues that arise. We have a strict Policy on 'Naat for Prophet and Not Profit' and totally condemn the idea of fixing payments for Naat Khawans. We also encourage our Naat Khawans to carry out community work and support charitable causes that are dear to them. So that the fully benefits of Naat Khawani can be attained.” (‘About’ Youth Naat Quran Council on Facebook).

As cited in the preceding chapter, due to their online following and influence, naat reciters are often misconstrued as preservers of Barelvi traditions and the expectation to maintain a public religious display, at all times, is placed upon them by their audiences. This can result in changes in outward public conduct, as shown in earlier research,

“Many of these young people accompany their performances of devotional song and poetry with a commitment to their faith that may entail change in behaviour or the adoption of a new appearance. There is a strong sense of a range of performative practices involving not just language and performance sui generis but also dressing, speaking, travelling and eating” (Rosowsky 2018, p.422).
Many users online manage their social and religious identities, by restricting or regulating what they display on social media, limiting some elements of their personal lifestyles, whilst exposing others. This reality is constructed and may be contrived, as personal accounts and pages only exhibit what the user chooses to reveal. This includes ‘tagged’ content (shared by others) which can also be managed by the user, to ensure it is not shared on their page. This obscures the authenticity and reality of naat reciters’ lived religious experiences; although they can be better observed through their online vlogs, which conveys insights into their social and spiritual endeavours. Online viewers may not always take these factors into account. Other differentials may also apply in the way individuals present themselves on different platforms, in terms of differences in sartorial choices and types of content (whether this may be more text-based or visual, secular or religious).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, an individual’s niyyah is an important aspect of their spiritual engagement. Many naat khwaans felt their online presence did not always accurately reflect the reasons why they were upholding a religious tradition. They wrote Facebook posts (paradoxically) for the public, praying for God to accept their intentions, to convey to their audiences that sincerity was internal.

We like to pick on other people’s faults as though we are perfect.

Let me be very clear when I say this, the majority of my posts are reminders to myself first. May Allah (SWT) be my witness I strive to light love of the Beloved (Peace Be Upon Him) in all our hearts.

Regarding the controversy about free mixing, I am against this though the event was in a public place, my intention was only to praise the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him)

(online fieldnotes, Facebook statuses by two different naat reciters, rephrased for anonymity 2017).

The reciters can be under relentless scrutiny, as audiences assess whether their efforts are sincere or disingenuous. The ‘comments’ sections enable users to share their judgments and
interpret people’s actions (even though online content may be posted out of context). This analysis is often based on a user’s personal understanding of what they deem ‘sacred’ or ‘profane’. Here are some examples:

It’d look amazing if you recite naats with atleast a kufi/topi on. Paying respect to the kalaam. Think about the positive influence u could have on the youngsters.

Is this music appropriate.

Facebook 'likes' boost peoples egos and make them feel like celebrities. When these brothers started out in their car I would look forward to their recordings and this was when the crowd didn't matter

When you recite praise of the messenger of God, do so as if he was watching you. It would take away this elaborate display and stop all the criticism you get

(re-phrased fieldnotes online research, Facebook and YouTube comments 2017).

As found in earlier research, because online interactions are transnational and translocal they occur in multiple languages including Urdu, Punjabi and English and are mediated through the Roman script (Rosowsky 2018). English and Roman Urdu/Punjabi words are also written in a colloquial vernacular and abbreviated in ‘SMS’ or text messaging language. Young Muslim consumers are both part of transnational communities and creatively select elements of their parental culture(s) to suit their current contexts (Werbner 2002a). The orthographic choices and mixing of languages online conveys the sociolinguistics of users and the presence of transnational audiences, who adopt multilingualism to demonstrate national, ethnic and global identities (see Cecelia and Røyneland 2018). For instance:

Apki awaz axi hai lykin please music k baghair naats prha karain.
[You have a nice voice but please pray naats without using music].

I agree. Then they were bopping with sunglasses on at parties in the park.
If you do have any feedback make it constructive so you don't upset the brothers. They're clearly very sincere.

That is next level.

(re-phrased fieldnotes online research, Facebook and YouTube comments 2017).

When individuals share their religious opinions, it can impact the relationship between believers and authority (Barak 2006). In the comments sections, users share their own interpretation and understanding of religion, and subsequently assess the naat reciters according to how well they meet this benchmark. Dialogues on the Internet can be both controversial and genuine, and inauthentic and divisive. This is because audiences in real-time do not have the same opportunities to comment on the practices of religious actors, as they are happening; whereas, online viewers have the autonomy to share their opinions, either openly or anonymously, without verification.

6.7 Sufi shopping: from asceticism to aesthetics

Having discussed the commodification of Islamic music, I now move on to the consumer dimensions of Sufi merchandise. The commercialisation of religious and Sufi paraphernalia online is part of the Islamic arts and fashion industry. In this space, young Muslims can construct hybridised individualised identities which reflect their faith and socio-cultural heritage and belonging. Barakah Base is one example of how Sufi identities can be fashioned through social media, where individuals can virtually ‘Sufi shop’ online, both by purchasing products and accessing religious teachings and gatherings. They can physically shape their religious appearances by wearing Sufi paraphernalia and access a single page, where they can navigate between the teachings of both classic and contemporary spiritual guides. This conveys the current ways online shoppers connect with a diverse array of Sufi traditions and how aesthetics can play a key role in appealing to modern spiritual communities. “Commercialisation has thus facilitated a shift from Islamic Sufism for piety to universalised Sufism for worldly efficacy” (Muttaqin 2012, p.43).
Material culture (books, literature, merchandise, paraphernalia) helps disseminate religion. The relationship between commercial and religious culture is not mutually exclusive;

\[162\] Some products were marketed during specific periods of the year, which had religious significance and/or were related to Sufi heritage.
“consumers see religious products as a means of expressing their faith while merchandisers see products—including religious practice itself—as a means to spread the faith” (Einstein 2007, p.75). The increase of materialism has implications for contemporary spirituality, perhaps even going against Sufi principles of asceticism, as people may buy into the aesthetics of a product. Sufi shopping via dresswear and products helps people to reconstruct global Sufi traditions, through symbols that are associated with culture and religion. Despite its commercial dimensions, most religious consumers believe they are taking the spiritual benefits of a product and that this in part connects them with their Islamic heritage (Einstein 2013; Rinallo et al. 2013). For example, consumers may be inspired to purchase decorative rosary beads for their design, but the purpose will usually be religious, that is to pray or remember God through its usage (Rinallo et al. 2013, pp.30–32).

The debates surrounding what can be considered legitimate Sufi practice can found in multiple contexts. Those who have been more lenient in their approach to religious rulings are often labelled ‘pseudo-Sufis’ (Dressler 2010, p.438). These conversations also took place with RC and GH. One respondent jestingly asked me, “are there Sufis at Rumi’s?” 163 This elicited a response from other attendees and people raised questions about who can rightly be considered a ‘genuine’ Sufi today. The group discussed Islam after the passing of Prophet Muhammad 164, when Muslims began separating religion (Islam), belief (Imaan) and the perfection of worship (Ihsan), instead of seeing them as one entity. One participant responded, “…therefore early Sufis had to distinguish themselves—which is why they seemed to ‘separate’ themselves”.

This led to conversations about the role of Sufi paraphernalia as dresswear, with references to a concept of ‘performed Sufism’, coined by my interlocutors. One participant elaborated on this by commenting, “many people idolise a Sufi image and try to fit that, including some of those who attend events at Rumi’s.” This suggests a Sufi identity is formed through external appearance as well as internal spiritual practice. In keeping with social constructionist theory,

163 Fieldnotes RC after the Friday congregational prayer, 27/10/2017.
164 Peace Be Upon Him.
these debates signify the way that ‘what counts’ as Sufism or who can be identified as a Sufi is contested, negotiated and may be contextually-dependent.

6.8 Beyond Sufi tariqas

I now return to my third research question on what the new Sufi phenomenon tell us about religious engagement amongst young British Muslims. Online and offline consumer practices amongst young Muslims are consonant with wider changes in youth religious activity within their social landscape. These do not exist in a vacuum and occur in the face of global trends and a multitude of contextual influences. Trends of religious and spiritual adaptation have also been found in research amongst young members of faith communities in Britain, where the impact of globalisation and new communication technologies has resulted in popular culture replacing institutional religion (Collins-Mayo et al. 2010; Collins-Mayo 2016).

In this study, the evidence suggests young Muslims are creating and seeking new organisational opportunities where institutional religion has perhaps failed them (see Chapter Five). Affiliation with Sufi tariqas did not appear to be in decline as members of staff and participants spoke highly of their shaykh and tariqa.

After attending an event for the first time, I want to explore Sufism by going to more events at Rumis in the near future. I’m happy to attend a dhikr or mawlid gathering, which is strange for me as it’s something I’ve never done, but during Rabi ul Awwal at Rumis I would be happy to (paraphrased fieldnotes from participant at RC, 21/11/2017).

Both staff at RC and GH informed me that many of those who were more actively engaging in, or displaying, Sufi practice were already members of a tariqa and/or disposed to spirituality. Others can find Sufism or tariqa through their interactions with, and recommendations by other teachers, performers and attendees at these centres during events. The majority of people who were members of Sufi tariqas had found their shaykh externally. These organisations facilitate learning from different teachers, which does not compromise their allegiance to their own Sufi order. If they come across a teacher or a
practice that is not in harmony with their (Sufi) beliefs, they can reject them in a way that does not disrupt participation within gatherings.

As shown in previous research, “traditional Sufi modes of organisation are difficult to maintain in the new settings” (Stjernholm 2014, p.206). Belonging to a Sufi tariqa or pledging allegiance to a Sufi shaykh requires a permanent, or prolonged commitment, which necessitates adherents to uphold shared responsibilities and follow group activities. For instance, mureeds may be under observation by the shaykh, and be expected to attend events and dhikr gatherings at set times and actively undergo self-reformation and self-purification. As discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.2.1), islah and tazkiya are important elements of Sufi discipline. Some Sufi tariqas will also require mureeds to complete tazkiya sheets that are monitored by the shaykh to oversee how they are implementing Sufi practice in their internal thoughts and external actions.

For some followers, this may be difficult to maintain, and additionally fear their communal reputation should they leave the tariqa (Werbner 2007). Muslim consumers attending post-tariqa centres can study with a shaykh(s) and have the option to follow or discard their spiritual advice, as they are not under individual observation. The transmission of faith via ‘intermediaries’ (such as, chaplains, performers, Internet figures), who bridge understandings of religion between previous and current generations, helps preserve religious traditions and allow young Muslims to contextually apply them in their current settings (Guest 2008; Gilliat-Ray et al. 2013; Scourfield et al. 2013).

The producers of religious activities are concurrently the consumers, as they also participate in the events and services they help create. Some people are ‘active consumers’ – they make a conscious decision to choose to engage in Sufi practice and know that they are looking for avenues to increase their faith. Others are ‘passive consumers’, they are in the formative years of constructing their religious identities and/or may not be expecting to access Islam/Sufism. They enjoy the element of socialisation are open to accepting the different

\[165\text{ Fieldnotes at RC informal interview with manager on 24/11/2017 and informal interviews with GH staff on 31/07/2018.}\]
ways the spaces may or may not impact them. These binaries are not contrasting and may overlap.

6.8.1 Religious experimentation

As discussed earlier in this chapter, religious participation amongst young Muslims can be both collective and individualistic. At both RC and GH, participants were ‘spiritual shopping’ (see Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Hervieu-Léger 2006), by experimenting with other spiritual traditions. During a retreat organised by GH, one attendee shared that she was reading on Christian and secular spirituality (e.g. the law of attraction, also referred to as ‘The Secret’) as she had found commonalities with Islam, which strengthened her faith. Others spoke of attending gatherings at different Sufi tariqas, Sufi-inspired organisations and online micro-madrassas.- This is intrareligious experimentation. Some of my participants had experienced a stringent way of being taught Islam when they were younger by their mosque teachers, and were now looking for a ‘softer’ approach:

My uncle was part of the Naqshbandi tariqa, but he believed every other group was on the wrong path. He used Sufism as a way of projecting his own ego. I now prefer learning Sufism by studying the purification of heart and removing the ego (paraphrased, participant at GH 05/08/2018).

Spaces like RC welcome people who are not religious and wanted to experiment with Islamic/Sufi practice. A manager informed me:

People have walked in drunk or even come in with shoes. They haven’t been rebuked, as some people don’t know, it may not be malicious. Rumi’s is open to all. There’s no pressure, you don’t even have to pray, you’re welcome to just sit (paraphrased informal interview, 24/11/2017).

There are issues surrounding religious discipline and accessibility amongst Muslim consumers. Flexibility and negotiation in religion can result in perceptions that normative

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166 Fieldnotes from GH Sisters Retreat, 05/08/2018.
religious teachings and practices are being compromised. Previously, spiritual training in the *sharia* was usually considered essential to progress on to *tariqa* (the path of spiritual learning), whereas now *tariqa* is being used to access *sharia*. Young consumers are entering Sufi practice to access Islam and using ‘bite-sized *sharia*’ through short courses for their Islamic education. In RC, one person shared:

> People shop around for different *tariqas*, but Shaykh Babikir wants them to be serious about *tariqa* and find their one place – irrespective of the Sufi order. He gave the example of someone digging a few metres to build a well in different areas and leaving this incomplete; instead of digging deep in one place (paraphrased, informal interview 24/11/2017).

Similarly, at GH, Ibrahim told me:

> I was with the Ba’Alawi *tariqa* and then changed to the Shahdhili *tariqa*, and then eventually joined the Naqshbandi Haqqani’s. I didn’t feel the connection...you don’t choose the *shaykh* the *shaykh* chooses you. The Ba’Alawi *shaykh* focused on struggle with the self and the teachings of Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and the Shahdhili’s focused primarily on sacred knowledge. It was during a personal moment of hardship that I found the Naqshbandi way, which focused on the *shaykh* and servitude (paraphrased, informal interview 31/07/2018).

An increase in religious commercialisation sometimes leads to this form of ‘*baraka*-surfing’ (Hermansen 1997, p.158), where some spiritual seekers move between multiple Sufi orders and ‘shop’ for a Sufi teacher (Rozehnal 2019, p.68). Essentially, ‘belonging’ amongst Muslim communities is associated with joining a *tariqa* and an affiliation to a particular denomination – not a mosque or institution by itself – which allows people to attend different mosques, provided they adhere to the same creed or broader school of thought (*madhhab*). One participant claimed his attendance at the centre was not the only factor influencing his personal, sacred quest and spirituality; rather it was complimented with religious classes hosted at other organisations and access to religion online. He added,

> This is an aspect of our age, where we are no longer part of a single circle, as we are able to access teachings from different schools of thought, diverse *shaykhs* and religious gatherings on the Internet (paraphrased, fieldwork data collected on 27/11/2017).
Both inside and outside of these institutions, participants will often draw upon different cultures and sources, such as poetry, books and the Internet. This is parallel to the ‘multiple seeking’ Sutcliffe (2003, p.204) conceptualises in his study where, “an array of spiritual resources are exploited more or less simultaneously. Ideas, methods and techniques are decontextualized and reconstituted in new settings and adventurous juxtapositions”.

6.8.2 Bricolage

Religious experimentation is enabled through bricolage. This is “an individuals’ creativity, namely the crafting of eclectic styles, religiosities and identities through personal choice” (Altglas 2014a, p.475), and “these religious resources have been constructed and disseminated on the terms of those who appropriate them” (p.488). Practices of bricolage can be seen through the use of communication technologies, such as the Internet and mobile phones. Mobile phones have multiple functions which facilitate social networking, rapid dissemination of information and access to the Internet, replacing the need to access books and sacred texts, computer and television screens. This allows instant access to networking, knowledge and popular culture, with the privacy to access data on a personal device that is not monitored by others.

“Religious activity is, increasingly, subject to personal choice, or voluntarism, and that, increasingly, for many in the advanced societies, religious identities are assembled to create a bricolage of beliefs and practices” (Lyon 2000, p.76 cited in Einstein 2007, p.25).

Individualism and individual consumerism may not be replacing collective traditions, as found in earlier research (Hervieu-Léger 2006); rather people seem to be taking a more personal approach to faith, whilst finding the right congregations in which they construct and reinforce their religious identities. This suggests they are not losing the cultural or religious traditions of their parents (see Hervieu-Léger 2006), but finding ways to reconstruct them in different settings. As found in the rational choice theory, the consumers are finding ways to choose religious activities that suit their own interests and maximise from the benefits the religious producers provide them (Iannaccone 1995; Finke and Stark 1998).
6.8.3 Sectarianism

Many people appear to be in search of a ‘middle way’ – to find inclusivity and spirituality – between ‘religious exclusivism’, believing in the unique truth of their faith and creed, and ‘spiritual shopping’, picking and mixing from different denominations, whilst accepting this religious diversity and being respectful to other faith communities (Aldridge 2007). For young Muslims living in Britain who are familiar with the context of religious pluralism (Davie 2000) it can be easier to tolerate differences in belief and practice and allow people to experience ‘faith at their own pace’. For this reason, RC encourage interfaith activities, and GH welcome Muslims from alternative sectarian backgrounds, despite the leaders holding strong Ahl as-Sunnah allegiances themselves. For young people this “individual authenticity…what feels right and allows the individual to make sense of his/her own life is what ultimately is accepted as religious truth” (Collins-Mayo 2012, p.85).

Certain scholarly issues shouldn’t be shared with lay people as it causes sectarianism, these are complicated issues which need a fair bit of study (teacher one).

This is factual information rather than emotional. A positive note is we have a Marriage service here called Sacred Vows if you’re looking to get married to a Sunni (teacher two).

Let’s finish on a positive note - sectarianism is bad, there’s no positive to it. Become educated, learn the religion (deen), come away from the volatile climate of South Asia. It can give you the opportunity to think twice about your approach to sectarianism and the views of others. You don’t have to agree with everyone, but living in civil society for the common Muslim, you cannot enforce your views on anyone, although the ulama should do da’wah.

(fieldnotes, GH one-day course ‘73 Sects in Islam’, 04/08/2018).

She then went on to say, there’s a problem with m awlan as and women rights, but some m awlan as and shaykhs are well spoken on women’s role and rights. One lady spoke about the

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167 A learned male Muslim scholar.
good teachings of Mawlana Tariq Jamil’s lectures (despite being Barelvi herself and him being of a Deobandi background!) (fieldnotes, GH ladies retreat 05/08/2018).

Sufi practice and the search for spiritual experience is a subjective choice (Heelas et al. 2005). Many young people are following a personal approach to faith, determining what feels right according to their own relationship with God, without rejecting religious authorities nor seeking independence from them (Day 2009; Day 2011; Collins-Mayo 2012).

One person even spoke about how he was initially a Salafi before he became inclined to Sufism (fieldnotes RC, 25/10/2017).

We are in the time of tribulation (fitna), you should not be in any camp only in camp of Allah, not to be Sufi, Salafi, Shia, Sunni... be in the middle, Muslims should be in middle, straight path (fieldnotes RC, teaching from Shaykh Babikir in his one-day Qur’an tafsir course, 11/11/2017).

From her observation in comparison to Salafism, Sufism and communities who follow Sufi traditions cater to creative traditions and creative Muslims, which allows them to be themselves and feel safe and appreciated... when she was Salafi she was less creative, and stopped playing instruments (fieldnotes informal interview RC, 21/11/2017).

The diversity of attendees from a range of sectarian backgrounds affirms intrareligious experimentation and intra-Sufi networking, where individuals can opt to learn from people who belong to different denominations and Sufi orders, and hold multiple affiliations to several religious organisations (see Dressler 2009). Nonetheless, as shown earlier, sectarian identities differ amongst young Muslims, appearing more salient amongst Barelvi-Sufis (see Sections 6.5 and 6.6). This also pressurises naat khwaans to portray a strong association with their aqida, which is mostly reinforced by ulama and pirs whose objective is to maintain the transmission of ethno-religious values (see Geaves 2000).

6.9 Beyond the mosques

Previous research has documented the importance of mosques, “for the maintenance and nurture of religious identity, especially among British-born Muslim youth”, via after school
Islamic studies classes (*maktab/madrassa*) (Gilliat-Ray 2010, p.194). Purpose-built mosques, in particular, provide additional social functions offering a space for: advice, youth gatherings, soup kitchens, missionary work and communal gatherings (Ahmed 2016; McLoughlin 2005; Gilliat-Ray 2010). However, many mosques in Britain are limited in the provision of these services, along with reduced participation of women and young people (Brown 2008). At RC and GH social and secular activities are offered within a religious framework and context and fill an important gap. For many attendees the events and facilities provided by the centres are used a form of ‘halal pastime’, activities that they can enjoy, learn and benefit from, which simultaneously become a means of spiritual reward.

For example, weekend spiritual retreats are a means of halal travel and a ‘getaway’ for attendees who must seek permission from their parents to spend a weekend away from home. Similarly, during movie nights, the film creates avenues for conversations amongst the youth, which leads to them conversing on a wide range of topics, many of which link back to Sufi teachings (even though this may not always relate to the theme of the event). During one of my observations, this included participants recommending litanies and advising on maintaining ‘personal spirituality’—such as remaining sincere, purifying one’s intention, living in the present and keeping good company, and believing the people one associates with, their conversations and sins, can impact the heart. Others shared their personal journey with faith, including their former associations with other religious denominations. A social activity became a channel for religious discourse and exchange of knowledge, leaving the attendees with a sense of spiritual fulfilment.

As one participant understood it, these activities could provide an instant “spiritual boost”, an enjoyable way of increasing their faith. The outward-facing, community focus provides a source of inspiration and reassurance for young attendees who feel accepted. These sentiments were expressed by participants who believed the centres provided community projects and allowed likeminded people to congregate and converse with one another; services that were either absent from many mosques or were not advertised suitably to retain

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168 Fieldnotes GH Sisters Retreat, 05/08/2018.
170 Fieldnotes GH Sisters Retreat 05/08/2018.
young people’s interest. They spoke of the demand of these centres in other regions, as people were commuting long distances to attend gatherings and attending infrequently due to their geographical locations (despite both centres operating in two major cities!).

In contrast to earlier research, in a pluralistic religious economy these religious organisations are not necessarily in competition with other institutes (Stark and Bainbridge 1987). Rather, they are a supplementary outlet to other faith institutions, which provide additional services, that can be accessed without belonging or association. This flexibility is especially oriented to accommodate for a busy Western lifestyle and caters to the particular needs of young religious consumers (Hechte and Kanazawa 1997).

6.9.1 From the old to the new

Specialist and innovative modes of religious organisation, provide new opportunities for reassurance and leadership (Wilson 1976).

“Religious pluralism fosters competition which makes each religious group work harder to meet the religious needs of the populace, thus involving more people in religion. Moreover, expanded religious choices increase the chances that any individual will become involved in some religious group” (Olson and Hadaway 1999, p.490).

Brekke (2016, p.51) conceptualises certain religious groups as ‘clubs’, which are comprised of members who invest their time, money and energy in exchange for activities, and others – the less committed attendees – as ‘free-riders’, who want to participate and enjoy the benefits, without the same level of commitment. As levels of enthusiasm and other such assurances cannot always be monitored, in exchange, they may ask for donations and regular attendance, to maintain group activity. Similar scenarios take place at RC and GH, however, the leaders expect a lack of commitment, whilst creating provisions for people to consume activities and maintaining sustainability, by requesting funding from wider Muslim communities, regardless of their attendance.

Religious membership and affiliation in Britain is in decline, and only those organisations that provide social and civic value for their audiences seem to flourish (Davie 2015). Iannaccone’s (1995) research notes that churches that extract more time and money from their members tend to have an upsurge in membership. However, in these centres, growth in membership comes from the provision of fluid attachments, that are non-contractual, where consumers are not bound to any one organisation. Moreover, the socio-economic status of young Muslims (Gilliat-Ray 2010; Kabir 2012), many of whom are students, means participation increases where religion can be consumed at no, or reduced, costs.

6.10 Conclusion

By analysing the different socio-religious contexts where Sufism is consumed and operates, that are public and private, institutional and noninstitutionalized, national and transnational, I have conveyed the different ways religion is performed, mediated, commercialised and mostly importantly, ‘lived’ (Woodhead 2013; Dessing et al. 2013; McLoughlin 2014). The consumption and commercialisation of Sufism has come to exist because of a gap in the current religious market which fails to meet young Muslims’ social and religious expectations. “Sufism in the West has the capacity not only to diversify Islam but also to operate in different social and public spheres” (Milani and Possamai 2015, p.17). My findings support the claim that young people will transform, create and become involved in new forms of religious involvement when institutional religion fails them (Houtman and Aupers 2007).

The Internet provides more avenues for cultural literacy and religious involvement for young Muslim consumers, which increases opportunities for spiritual engagement. In the West, Sufi poetry, music and practice are advertised and sold under the label of ‘esoteric globalisation’ (Dressler 2009, p.86). Religious culture amongst young Muslims is changing (as observed via Sufi paraphernalia, naat khwaani and new religious institutions), to embody parental, global and British heritages. Young Muslims turn to artistic and creative religious expression, as form of spirituality, that helps them to denote their relationship with the Divine. In both the offline and online spheres, communal experiences and the transmission of religious traditions has supported active participation in faith when mosques and Sufi tariqas may have failed to
provide, or restricted, their public services (Hervieu-Léger 2000). These are essential to retain young people’s connection with Sufism and Islam. In the next chapter, I discuss my findings collectively, by charting how I have answered each of my research questions.
Chapter Seven – Discussion and Contribution

7.0 Introduction

Sufism is an integral part of the Islamic esoteric tradition for spiritual education and embodiment of faith and practice. In the literature review, I identified several key components that were unexplored in the existing academic studies of contemporary Sufism, especially pertaining to young British Muslims production and consumption of faith. This included new ways of mobilising Sufi activities and the role of social media in creating avenues for bricolage, personalised access and transmission of Sufism. In this thesis, I have analysed and provided explanations for these religious developments, many of which have emerged contextually, due to the wider religious and social landscape. In Chapter Three, I discussed the ways in which this research is premised on theories about everyday lived religion and the market model of religion. These theoretical underpinnings, paired with conceptual tools on post-tariqas and cyber Sufism, have allowed me to uncover forms of religion that were ‘less-visibly-institutional’ (Dessing et al. 2013, p.2), which previous researchers may have overlooked when considering modern articulations of Sufi practice. As commented by Woodhead,

“The perspective of everyday lived religion prompts the question what more there is to religion: whose lives, experiences and associational forms are being overlooked by the dominant gaze...and what other forms of cultural, ritual, domestic, political, and economic practice might be equally worthy of study under the rubric of religion” (Woodhead 2012, p.4).

Through my study on contemporary Sufism, I have sought to understand the various ways this tradition is preserved and most importantly, lived, in both public and private spheres. The theoretical frameworks alongside ethnographic and netnographic research methods, have revealed Sufism in new organisational forms via UK registered charities, and in private spaces, such as within cars, wedding halls and homes.

My positionality has been a significant part of this academic journey, as I share multiple demographic markers of my identity with my participants, which has enabled both awareness
of, and access to, new forms of Sufi expression. Analysing my data through the lens of everyday lived religion, has allowed me to uncover the different ways understandings of spirituality and Sufism were shaped by participants’ subjective experiences. Thus, in this project I was less concerned with what constitutes ‘correct’ religious practice, and rather focused on how Islamic practices were negotiated and reconstructed by followers who adopted or sympathised with Sufi traditions. As an interdisciplinary project based on collection of data using multiple qualitative research methods, I have been able to make a number of unique contributions across multiple disciplinary fields: Sufi and British Muslim Studies, the Sociology of Religion and Cyber-Religious Studies. In this chapter, I tie together the various analytical and theoretical threads that I introduced in the preceding chapters and convey the significance and implications of my findings by charting the ways I have answered each of my research questions.

1. What are the current forms of Sufi expression amongst young British Muslims?

It has been over half a decade since the last comprehensive study of Sufism in Britain (Gabriel and Geaves 2014b), whereas more recent scholarship has focused more on Sufism via neo-traditionalism and post-modern spirituality (Morris 2016; Quisay 2019). The current literature was in need for renewal, to account for changes in Sufi expressions amongst British Muslims who have created new avenues of accessing Sufism beyond mosques and tariqas. In Chapter Four, I mapped many new Sufi influences in offline and online contexts, that exist outside of tariqa, in the current British landscape. This unique contribution enhanced understanding of numerous new institutions and religious figures, who have gained more young Muslim followers over the last five years, but received little, or no, attention in the academic literature. This is due to: recent developments in Sufi activities which have been diversified by a more youthful demographic, Sufism online, limitations in earlier researchers’ positionality, as they were unexposed to these new trends, and focus of scholarship on institutional or ‘official’ forms of Sufism. I especially identified the emergence of post-tariqa forms of Sufism and mapped their influence amongst young British Muslims, who were accessing religion through translocal and transglobal networks.
7.1 Post-tariqas

In the preceding findings chapters, I intentionally incorporated some ‘thick description’ of two specific new Sufi organisational forms, to convey the dynamic and multifarious ways the institutions function (Chapter Five, Section 5.1), and the ways in which they depart from traditional modes of congregating in the presence of a shaykh (Chapter Five, Section 5.2). Unlike Sufi tariqas, the role of the shaykhs are often obscure and their patronage at the institutions help govern employees, as opposed to attendees. Rumi’s Cave and Guidance Hub provide forms of grassroots activism via charitable projects and social gatherings, that are similar to other Islamic organisational structures, such as the idara (literally defined as ‘centre’) (Morgahi 2014, p.221). These alternate communal spaces where religion is less stringent and prescriptive fill the gap between mosques and Sufi tariqas. As non-sectarian spaces, they allow people to attend without fear of judgment or criticism; they can cultivate a sense of belonging, without joining. Instead of promoting Sufism through perennialism or Universal traditions in order to accommodate possible non-Muslim engagement (Sedgwick 2004), these organisations encourage interfaith relations and for people of no faith to join in activities – without curtailing their Islamic content – in the hope that this will encourage people to discover Islam.

In terms of non-Muslim participation in the organisations, there was a slight incongruence between what I saw as a researcher in comparison how the organisations were portrayed. It was also difficult to decipher who was non-Muslim and who may have converted to Islam. I noticed there were non-Muslim members of staff who were invited to the centres and helped in organising events, but none of them comprised the audience during religious gatherings. Perhaps the people I spoke to at my field sites were just making rhetorical claims about inclusivity and reaching out to non-Muslims as something they aspired to do more of. As my research was conducted over a limited time period it may have been that there were not so many non-Muslims present during that time, nor were there any targeted events scheduled to increase their participation. However, from browsing their social media pages it did seem that RC seemed to be promoting a universal approach to Islam online, although this did not match the empirical reality. They also had previously timetabled more interfaith events in comparison to GH, suggesting that they were more tolerant of accepting people to practice
their own faith. It suggested that RC use *da’wah* by drawing on the universal appeal to Sufism, as a mechanism for acclimatising non-Muslims to Islam, whereas GH are just doing *da’wah* alone, and use the centre to promote Ahl as-Sunnah traditions.

Perhaps non-Muslim engagement was consciously inflated by people at my field sites, as in comparison to Salafism, Sufism is often used in a context of promoting a more moderate form of Islam and being agreeable to religious integration (Hamid 2016) (See Chapter Two). It is also interesting to note that in the 1990s those inclined to the Salafi movement would recruit other Muslims on university campus and would use *da’wah* to convince Muslims loyal to Sufism to leave their own religious gatherings (Geaves 2006, p.146). However, now those who are committed to a Sufi-influenced Islam use similar structural and academic formats of learning to encourage students at universities to follow Islam that is rooted in the Islamic sciences and the Prophetic example.

Post-tariqas may overlap with ‘universal’ and ‘neo-Sufi’ manifestations. They can be considered universal as they transcend allegiance to a formal *tariqa*\(^\text{172}\) (although it does not depart from Islam). It also facilitates an eclectic and ‘pick and mix’ approach, tolerating other traditions without adopting their beliefs and allowing people to choose amongst an array of Islamic sources (Barnes 1996; Jackson 2014). Nevertheless, religious activity differed between Rumi’s Cave and Guidance Hub, the latter being more conservative in their approach to religious knowledge and retaining a strong allegiance to the Ahl as-Sunnah. Although RC also connected their teachings to traditional Sunni belief, there was more evidence of maintaining religious pluralism – by accepting people of other faiths maintaining their own religion. Similarly, neo-Sufi expression can also be found through the ways in which Muslim attendees engage in Sufi practice via modern technologies and by negotiating Sufism in relation to their experiences with Western culture (Hamid 2014; Knysh 2017). Post-tariqas may also incorporate multi-\(tariqa\) activities, such as events which host *shaykhs* from diverse \(tariqas\) or people taking spiritual advice from *shaykhs* and teachers whilst belonging to other Sufi orders.

\(^{172}\) As found in Hazen’s (2014) research, where her participant described himself a ‘post-tariqa *shaykh*’ because he does not identify with any one *tariqa*. 
As outlined in Chapter Four, these new developments require a different model of understanding Sufi activities in Britain and challenge Geaves's (2000) original typology. I proposed his categorisation can be extended to include the influence of post-tariqas and online settings, where Sufism can be accessed and negotiated by multiple audiences – which maybe unintentional and incidental. Now having presented and analysed my findings, I contest Geaves' (2000, p.72) categorisation that Sufism in Britain is contained in only four categories, including his understanding that members of Sufi tariqas are normally comprised of practicing Muslims, belonging to a homogenous ethnic identity. This is because many young British Muslims hold ‘super-diverse’ identities with mixed cultural ethnic backgrounds (Vertovec 2014), and tariqas are now not the only place where Sufism is accessed. In my field sites, Sufi allegiance appears to be strong (and transcends ethnicity) but is not solely located in a tariqa nor loyalty to a particular shaykh, even though a shaykh may be present. My findings confirm there are new forms of tariqa associations adapting to the contemporary context,

“A Sufi order is, in a sense, a voluntary association that members join for purposes related to a conception of the common good. The degree to which the followers of a shaykh actually perceive themselves as a community and act as such varies, as does the degree to which they admit common objectives beyond the performance of ritual... [However, it is] the essentially charismatic and authoritarian character of leadership in the orders makes them different from modern civic associations with elected and representative leadership, but the twentieth century brought about various forms of accommodation between these two types” (Bruinessen 2007, p.96).

As discussed in the literature review, scholars in Sufi studies have used the term ‘post-tariqas’ uncritically (Hermansen 2012; Sedgwick 2016), without sufficiently clarifying what this concept means and substantiating this with ethnographic research. Moreover, in the existing literature this trend has not been identified in the British context and has mostly been referenced in relation to changes in Sufi structures in America (Hermansen 2007; Hermansen 2012). Through mixed-methods research, I have contributed to this field by identifying the hallmarks of post-tariqa Sufism in Britain, of which to date, no comprehensive definition exists (Chapter Five, Section 5.10). One key feature is the bifurcation in the role of the shaykh,
who upholds Sufi traditions, whilst providing opportunities for them to be negotiated and reconstructed. Subsequently, followers can use this association to pledge their allegiance or find a connection to a tariqa. Or, they may overlook this altogether and only choose to derive benefit from the facilities that suit their individual requirements, such as finding sociability (or a marriage partner!).

An additional characteristic is the accommodation of these organisations in their current settings, providing services that are practical and constructive, and meet the social and religious demands of their intended audiences. It is not uncommon that Sufi groups and their followers have adapted to their local contexts within Western settings, both by being acculturated into society and into their original cultures (Hazen 2016; Bang 2017). Post-tariqa Sufism can exist in both organisational and noninstitutionalized forms, such as on the Internet, where people can access and negotiate their engagement with Sufi traditions beyond the tariqa and affiliation to a shaykh. My findings have therefore disproven Bennett and Ramsey’s (2012, p.290) claim that post-tariqa Sufism has not found broader reception than institutional Islam, as these groups go beyond mosques, tariqas and da’wah organisations.

Previous research on Sufism in modern contexts has argued that,

“Increasingly, Muslims loyal to the turuq have become concerned that the combination of urban environments, Western education and the secular ethos will provide the conditions in which they will lose their children either to the attractions of the pursuit of material pleasures or to recruitment by the better organised reform movements” (Gabriel and Geaves 2014b, p.10).

The formation of post-tariqas helps manage this concern as they provide facilities that synchronise multiple elements of faith, culture and society, which enables both edification and recreation in a religious framework. This helps maintain young Muslims’ connection to religious leadership (shaykhs and ulama), enables spirituality through creative expression (arts and music) and provides opportunities for communal worship, in the same ways as the
existing Islamic infrastructures, through dhikr and mawlid gatherings and congregational prayers (see Chapter Five).

Sufi tariqas are very much prevalent as association still seems to be high amongst many of my participants (see Chapter Six), so they are not so much being replaced, but new organisational forms exist to harmonise communal, religious and social issues. My definition of post-tariqas may be contested as communal organisations, like idaras, have been previously setup by mureeds of Sufi shaykhs. However, where previous research has suggested that such followers continue the social obligations of Sufi orders via these community centres, the case sites in my study reveal a more distinctive form of Sufi mobilisation (Geaves 2000; Howell 2007). This entails leadership and management by people who are not the shaykhs’s mureeds and who do not promote membership to his, or any specific, tariqa. Idaras still promote the tariqa, or the shaykh in some form, with the hope attendees will gradually build this association. However, in the centres I studied, association to Sufism is not through a focus on membership, rather the individual embodiment of Sufi characteristics and social action.

My findings can neither support nor disregard Hermansen's (2009; 2012, p.247) claims that the Deobandi and Barelvi movements can be considered post-tariqa movements as sectarian affiliation in the centres I examined were diverse. However, this implies that further research would be needed in the British context to confirm this.

RC and GH offer versatile spaces that can be transformed from places of learning and spirituality, to hosting social and sporting events. Association to Sufism is voluntary and flexible, and is often promoted implicitly, through principles of ‘ilm, khidma and the Prophetic Sunnah to help people revive religious traditions and perfect their character. This renewal presents Sufism in a way that is contextually relevant. This is significant because,

“Another way in which Sufism is vetted in contemporary contexts is in consideration of whether it is a textual or a contextual tradition. When Sufi textual traditions are treated as more legitimate than contextual practises such as shrine veneration or whirling, a hierarchy of cultures and privileged types tend to follow” (Sharify-Funk et al. 2017, p.247)
New Sufi outlets concurrently ‘re-invent’ and ‘revive’ Islamic traditions, not limiting its role to one or the other (McLoughlin 2005; Ahmed 2016). Like previous typologies of Sufism in the West (Geaves 2000; Hermansen 2006; Stjernholm 2014), my definition of post-*tariqas* will also be subject to adaptation as research in this field continues to progress and new Sufi fraternities emerge. There is no doubt this typology may not apply to centres that are not governed by Sufi *shaykhs*, and/or contain no, or little, *tariqa* influences. This can include Islamic creative social enterprises and the emerging field of Muslim spiritual (and/or Sufi) arts, as it becomes more refined. Perhaps this could be considered non-partisan Sufism or ‘*tariqa*-less’ belonging (Geaves 2020a; Geaves 2020b, pp.457–458), but more ethnographic research will be needed to confirm this.

7.2 The Sufi souk

As discussed in the literature review, one aim of this research was to see how Sufism remains relevant in a consumer society. I drew upon the rational choice theory to see whether it could provide an analytical tool to help explain some of these changes. However, Sufi and wider Islamic practices amongst young British Muslims is so varied and complex that no one theory can account or make sense of their religious engagement. The market model of religion and the rational choice theories were not a wide enough to help make sense of the multifaceted nature of post-*tariqa* spaces, and therefore I had to draw on theories on wider sociological understandings of contemporary consumer society.

An unexpected finding of this study was the role of money and finances. In a consumer society, the economic dimensions of Sufi activities have impacted the production and commercialisation of new religious enterprises. My conceptualization of the production of Sufism via ‘supply and demand’ has some overlap with the rational choice theory and the market model of religion (Finke and Stark 1992; Finke and Iannaccone 1993) (Chapter Five, Section 5.6). The producers acknowledge and address the gap in the religious landscape and through this ‘market research’ and informal evaluation, they create the facilities they know would overcome particular social and religious challenges for their communities. They are popular, “not incidentally...[but] because they work to attract customers” (Spickard 1998,
Religious consumers use rational reasoning in deciding which organisations to participate in, and which services meet their individual requirements, some of which will solely be for social outcomes (Iannaccone 1992; Iannaccone 1995).

The producers and consumers of Sufi manifestations are very much intertwined as they often engage in the same processes. The suppliers are often young British Muslims themselves, who have an awareness of the demand for particular social and religious facilities. They utilise branding, paraphernalia and merchandise to market their products and services, making them religious ‘entrepreneurs’.

“Brands are made up of a name, an identifying icon, a tagline, and a mythology, which combined help to differentiate one commodity product from another within a category. These images and stories are presented through advertising and marketing as a means to position products in the minds of the consumers” (Iannaccone 1992; Iannaccone 1995).

These modes of advertisement appeal to increasingly educated and professional youthful audiences, as the standards they expect from religious centres is also increasing, to reflect the options available in the marketplace, universities and other civic organisations. Post-tariqas are used in conjunction with other Islamic institutions due to their inclusion of women, community services, flexible and weekend opening hours and provision of halal forms of entertainment and leisure. They are not in competition with other religious firms (Finke 1990; Finke 1997), in order to replace them; rather the suppliers recognise that in order to counter secularisation, they must produce alternatives options to retain young Muslims’ connection with Islamic traditions.

RC and GH do not operate as businesses, but as UK registered charities, that not only meet a demand for their religious audiences, but also positively contribute to their wider social environment. This is characteristic of Sufi organisations,

“Sufism does invest substantially in “social capital”: it provides voluntary organisations that cut across traditional village and kin ties, ethnic and social divisions, regions and provinces in the places of origin” (Geaves 2016, p.239).
This allows us to consider value from social (charity and community work) and spiritual capital (merits in the Hereafter/otherworldly rewards) (Woodhead et al. 2002; Gauthier et al. 2013; Geaves 2016). Producers do not merely profit through finances, their work also ensues celebrity status, prestige, religious authority and spiritual merit. The shaykh(s) does not merely act as a ‘spiritual entrepreneur’ as an intermediary between himself and God, but takes on a more invested role as a ‘social entrepreneur’ by encouraging civic participation and delivering leisure activities (Werbner 2003; Geaves 2016, p.239). For members of staff, their workplace can provide purpose and a place of spiritual meaning, as their job role requires them to encourage people to become closer to religion and find a sense of community, through values of compassion and altruism (Ritter and Mahan 2016). The sale of merchandise, food and ticketed services, conveys pragmatism as it yields internal sources of funding to remain sustainable without relying on external support. Similarly, the consumers seek spiritual merit in exchange for their (paid) attendance to events. They may also relate social and sporting activities to the Prophetic tradition, or purchase Sufi paraphernalia with a link to a particular shaykh or tariqa in history. Through these means, people can find a sense of enjoyment or pursue their interests, whilst intending to gain thawaab.

Sufi practice has been impacted by societal influences of neoliberalism and globalisation that are embedded within modern societies, even though Sufi principles are premised on a rejection of these ‘worldly’ attributes. Sufism traditionally encourages people to dissociate from materialism and find spiritual purpose to improve their relationship with the Divine (Sedgwick 2003). However, despite the anti-materialistic sentiments of Sufi orders, in contemporary society some seekers use the very material means they should reject (expensive paraphernalia, monetary performances) to access this tradition.

Where the sacred and the profane overlap, religious producers structure their activities/services in a spiritual framework and the audiences draw upon the available repertoire of religious meanings to gain spiritual merit. The consumers making religious choices are not just looking at effectiveness in time and money (Iannaccone 1997), they are looking at otherworldly rewards. As I previously discussed in the literature review, this is what Stark (1997, p.7) has referred to as ‘compensators’; the reward may not necessarily be in the
physical space, or even in this world, it may be in the distant future or in another realm (such as, the Afterlife).

### 7.3 Sufism online

Studies of religion and the Internet show online modes of networking are an important medium for constructing identities and understanding religious transformations (Lövheim 2004). In this study, I identified how the digital space has been instrumental in influencing contemporary Sufi expression. I observed the ways RC and GH used social media to broaden their outreach and disseminate religion and their networks to younger audiences. Moreover, through two specific case studies of Sufi paraphernalia and Barelvi-Sufi *naat* practices, I analysed the ways in which the Internet further enables the production and consumption of transnational Sufism and religious commercialisation. As research in the use of music and religious changes amongst Jewish communities in Britain has shown, music, liturgy and paraphernalia produce emotional connections to religious traditions and resonate with more progressive communities who use these mechanisms to enhance their religious identities (Illman 2018, p.52).

In the literature review, I noted a gap in the existing academic studies on the influence of British youth *naat khwaani*, in evoking religious messages and reinventing *mehfils* in the digital space. As a unique contribution to this field, I presented the popularity of this transnational Sufi practice on social media, its reception amongst multiple audiences, including Barelvi *ulama*, and noted its impact on religious authority. This confirms earlier findings,

> “In a sense, *na’at* becomes a means through which communal belonging, based on ethnic solidarity and diasporic culture, can be upheld. Reciters within this context therefore tend to identify more strongly with religious leadership as traditionally conceived within the local South Asian Muslim community – religious authority for the individual and for the community become tightly bound together” (Morris and Rooij 2019, p.13).

Where previous research has focused on the importance of imams, *shaykh* and *ulama*, who often shape the public production of religion (Lewis 2007; Gilliat-Ray 2010; Geaves 2014b),
today, an increase in young people’s social media presence means they are now exposed to new religious figures, with whom they can engage in worship (such as, listening to devotional poetry) and sacred learning. This can diversify young people’s access to faith and their attitudes towards religion, potentially changing their cultural practices while remaining influenced by modern, Western and global cultures (Williams and Kamaludeen 2017).

The producers of Sufism in Britain are using the organisations and social media opportunities as a platform for themselves as religious entrepreneurs that they cannot find in wider British society, nor within mosque spaces. They may not all be aalims, nor do they have attributes/roles that give them prominence in society – but via social media and in my case-study sites, they can achieve a reputation that they cannot find elsewhere. In this sense, Sufism is a vehicle for a new form of religious entrepreneur, one that is abetted by social media and enabled through digital literacy. Religious authority is mediated by a different faith-inspired employability skillset – learning to play a (halal) instrument, their number of ijazas, who they have studied under, who they have trained with, a melodious voice, who they are endorsed by and so on. Their titles are a symbol of authority (shaykh(a), naat khwaan, faith-inspired artist, performer) and this may influence people in attaining these titles or developing these skills. This ‘Islamic CV’ for the role of a religious influencer offers a different type of spiritual credibility. On this market, religious influence is diffuse, hence people are using a certain criteria to ascertain who is more trustworthy to follow. They may be following an individual or approaching religion as a personal choice, but this inspires the collective.

This is characteristic of young Muslims finding new avenues for entrepreneurship in Western contexts,

“These Muslims are not rejecting modernity, they are shaping it. They are turning their aspirations for freedom, security employment and engagement into a concentrate and formidable reality, and they are doing it at a frenzied pace. Theirs is an entirely new, and fresh and self-employed phenomenon that is going to change the societies that they live in, and by extension the wider world. They see their faith as a tool which to engage with modernity. They
are interested in rewriting rules of leadership, social structures, consumption and communication with one specific factor in mind: faith” (Janmohamed 2016, p.32).

They use their hybridised identities to create syncretic religious practices, that can be seen in socio-linguistics, sartorial choices and performance styles.

“In this more aesthetic context, traditional performance forms of the heritage languages are accompanied by a growing engagement with more popular and contemporary forms of verse and music in a dynamic example of the blend, or hybridity, of older and newer musical and literary performances. These sculpt out newer spaces, including online ones, for these sacred and sanctified practices, which are both private and public.” (Rosowsky 2018, p.415).

New forms of Sufi manifestations online, created by, and for young Muslims, appeal to this demographic. My findings confirm that:

“Rather than let it run its course, these young people have reclaimed and revitalised Sufism. While retaining the mysticism, philosophical roots and theological underpinnings of Sufism, they are also bringing it up-to-date with technology, thereby facilitating its continued relevance to their changed social contexts” (Cheruvallil-Contractor 2014, p.174).

It also affirms predictions that many young British Muslims would make more creative use of their religious, cultural and linguistic resources (Ballard et al. 2006). Their online efforts help to create a British Muslim halal entertainment and celebrity culture, as an alternative to other forms of secular popular culture (Morris 2017b; Morris 2017a). Since the New Age movement, young people are likely to encounter spiritualities in a number of cultural domains (Heelas and Seel 2003, p.234), including counter sub-cultures, commercial and mediated cultures, other faith traditions, and religious experimentation in their wider social milieu.

Islamic music and religious artefacts can be commodified for people to purchase and consume. Material culture orients Sufism in a broader global Islamic history for people to feel a shared Muslim identity. Sufi paraphernalia helps reproduce meanings and value, a reenactment of the spiritual (Bowman 2016), a connection with Islamic history and tradition
that binds Muslim global cultures and reinforces the concept of a connected Ummah (Ahmed 2003, p.iii).

“Consumers hunger for the authenticity – as cultural a construct as it may be- they imagine their premodern ancestors to have enjoyed, and they learn to read it into (or lament its absence from) the environments others have built for them” (Sherry 2013, p.226).

Contemporary Sufi expression is polyvalent and sometimes portrays an ideation of Islamic practices. In the online realm, aspects of Sufi culture are reconstructed by young Muslims that can be streamed, observed and purchased, as a form of vernacular religion, that is, “religion as people experience, understand, and practice it. It shapes everyday culture and disrupts the traditional boundaries between 'official' and 'folk' religion” (Primiano 1995, p.44 cited in Bowman and Valk 2014, p.5). This was predicted by Geaves in an earlier study of new Sufi movements in the UK,

“It is unlikely that the old traditional practices associated with rural ‘folk’ and ‘popular’ religion can survive beyond the first-generation migrants. Their children will seek to adapt Islamic belief and practice to the life in Britain; in this context reformed Sufi organizations will be able to compete with the revivalists of the Islamic movement by drawing on traditional family allegiances to the Ahl-e Sunnah wa’ al-Jama’h but also by matching them in providing a form of organization more suited to the needs and aspirations of the British contexts” (Geaves 2006, p.156).

My findings confirm, Voll’s (2007) theory that the old polarities of ‘rural-urban’ and ‘local-global’ no longer exist, and can be considered complementary, as opposed to contradictory. In addition to this, he was correct in his claim that the conceptual framework of contrasting ‘pre-modern’ and ‘modern’ modes of religious organisations and experiences cease to account for the experiences of contemporary Sufi groups (Voll 2007). My findings within offline and online contexts have shown how many young British Muslims are in search of new ways to reconstitute traditional forms of Sufism, in a way that is socially relevant, meaningful and relates to their British lifestyles. In ‘Sufism in Britain’ (Gabriel and Geaves 2014b, p.10) the editors questioned,
“...whether the British scene provides us with a British Sufism or merely the transplantation of Sufis into Britain. [Or] a third possibility is the blending of both into a unique form that is still developing and finding its identity as part of the Muslim presence in this country.”

My findings point to the latter, as both the producers and consumers, create and participate in a past tradition that is re-organised to make Sufism more relevant across multiple contexts and audiences.

2. What is the role of social media in contemporary religious expression?

Technology is advancing and digital platforms are increasingly ubiquitous. Social media tools are also developing, increasing the opportunities for young people to engage with, and practice religion online. For researchers in the sociology of religion, it is important to become acquainted with these new mechanisms to fully comprehend everyday lived religion. As discussed in Chapter Two, the existing scholarship has primarily focused on the online activities of tariqa-based groups, mostly through websites (Nielsen et al. 2006; Piraino 2016; Bunt 2018; Rozehnal 2019), or virtual Sufi gatherings and online forums (Cheruvallil-Contractor 2014; Svensson 2014). Through my study, I have conveyed how both followers of tariqa, non-Sufis and non-Muslims can access Sufism via social media. Religious teachings can be disseminated, and identities can be constructed simultaneously on these platforms. This project is the first to combine ethnographic and netnographic methods in the study of Sufism in Britain. An additional original contribution is my research on Sufi expression on social media. As this is a developing field the methodological contributions of this project, not least the navigation of access, are significant. My own biography as a young British Muslim woman, fluent in a range of community languages, has also enabled a very particular opportunity to study emerging expressions of contemporary Sufism.

The Internet and social media enable different forms of Sufi expression that address different audiences – Muslims and non-Muslims simultaneously. They offer a library of different resources, an historical overview of an organisation, public relations campaigns to promote Islam and charitable donation websites to raise funds for their services. Like other faith
communities, Muslims also use online tools of marketing and advertisement to promote syncretic religio-cultural practices and events (Hoover 1988; Illman 2018). In the literature review, I demonstrated how Sufi Shaykhs have flourished and expanded the number of their followers by using the Internet and communication technologies to promote their tariqa and encourage people to do bay’ah beyond their localities (Hill 2019). In virtual spaces, a shaykh’s invisibility may not equate to his absence, as he has created an online platform to guide his followers. He may correspond through a website or communicate his teachings and advice through devoted followers, who act as social media administrators, on the Internet. This provides new ways of engaging in Sufism.

Religious actors use digital media to encourage people to join them in physical gatherings, whilst also recognising that this is not always possible (e.g. women and international audiences), except for in virtual settings, so they ensure they provide ways of engagement that caters for this diversity. Livestreaming events on Facebook and YouTube is a critical evolution in Sufi practices, which assembles multiple, local and global audiences of diverse cultural heritages, to view events in real-time or replay them at a time of convenience.

“Modern communications and the emergence of significant Muslim diasporas throughout the world have introduced new modalities of global connectedness that can be conceptualized as varieties of transnationalism” (Bruinessen and Howell 2007, p.11).

Female participation also creates different forms of congregations and opportunities for their involvement (Aune 2004; Guest et al. 2004) in offline and online contexts, whether they are: mixed events separated by a room divider, joint male and female assemblies, female only events, and livestreamed events. My study suggests that more research needs to be completed on Muslim congregational studies in the UK to observe new forms of religious assemblies. This is also being acknowledged by scholars in British Muslim Studies (see Ahmed 2020).

7.3.1 Online authority
Although religious organisations hold onsite gatherings, they can be interspatial by simultaneously operating on social media. In contemporary society, an offline presence is not sufficient to reach a broader audience. The Internet and social media have become a cultural system which helps the resurgence of religion by broadcasting religious messages and forms of worship (Hoover 1988). Sufi groups have had to adopt modern technologies, whilst responding to them. In contrast to earlier research (Campbell 2010, p.132), more conservative audiences online (including the ulama), did not appear to consider technology or social media itself to be a threat to established ideological structures or modes of authority, but like progressive religious communities, they saw it as a means to strengthen their identities and broadcast authentic or true meanings of Islam. Their concerns were with unorthodox offline activities, shared on social media. These contestations were also played out in the comments sections by Muslim users, with debates on the permissibility of music, mixing of male and female audiences, photography with women, the etiquette of recitation and the accumulation of wealth (see Chapter Six, Section 6.6).

As discussed in Chapter One, the formation of Sufi tariqas helped manage the lack of formalised religious authority (Trimingham 1971). Today, the Internet facilitates a democratisation of authority, where people can hold diverse affiliations and make their own decisions on who to follow and what practices to engage in. “The nature of authority and the pedagogical processes involved in the transmission of religious knowledge are in a state of flux” (Morris and Rooij 2019, p.12). Although collective forms of worship were prevalent amongst my participants, they also spoke of accessing religion online to enhance their engagement with Islam (see Chapter Six, Section 6.5). This is an individualistic process, which enables a personal and fluid approach to faith, whereby users can choose, and decide who and what to follow or reject.

Furthermore, as discussed in more recent research,

“The increasing role of internet-mediated religious authority places further emphasis on who is qualified to deliver religious opinions in relation to everyday issues and opinions” (Bunt 2018, p.65).
People who post religious content online (e.g. naat khwaans) can be considered an authority or role-model because they attain a high number of viewers or followers. The Internet facilitate new ways of engaging in religious discourse (via comments, videos and status updates). On social media people bring their own understanding of religion and can impose their opinion on various audiences. Even though a user’s identity may be seemingly public (name, profile picture, basic biography), they are more likely to share their views and critique others behind a screen than face-to-face, as it lessens the potential antagonism behind their interactions.

“Social media in general, of which YouTube is part, hence makes diversity and its role in the objectification of Islam even more conspicuous. This is because the interface of YouTube and similar social media lowers the threshold for active participation in the externalisation of individual representations of Islamic authenticity and hence invites wider segments of Muslims into public religious discourse compared to earlier forms of web publishing” (Svensson 2014, p.106).

Social media blurs the lines of who is and is not a religious authority, and helps create alternative points of influence (Bunt 2009; Bunt 2018), who are no longer constrained by the title or discipline of an Imam or a pir. They define who they are, whilst concurrently being scrutinised by their viewers, who associate subjective meanings to their actions/performances. Some viewers will just be ‘scrollers’, who stumble upon or view online religious content unintentionally (when scrolling through their Facebook news feeds or being recommended videos by YouTube). Others may deliberately view content, but choose not to repeat viewing if this does not align with their religious understandings. For some people observations of mehfils and listening to kalaams will present an opportunity to gain spiritual merit, for others this will be a point of contention. These varying judgments will be played out in the comments sections, where everyone can share their opinion.

New religious influencers are being recognised by Muslim communities. In the context of naat khwaani, Barelvi ulama attempt to manage conflict and unorthodox practices through religious training, inviting renowned reciters from overseas to teach young reciters the meanings of kalaams and the importance of adab. Adab as correct etiquette or beautiful
behaviour, has always been an integral part of Sufi tradition, a characteristic that followers are expected to adopt as a moral and public virtue (Rozehnal 2018). They also play an instrumental role in guiding and teaching reciters behind the public gaze, and overtly in mehfils, where reciters congregate, in fear that any malpractice will undermine the Barelvi aqida and future generations association with this tradition.

More studies are needed on religious expression on social media, and via social networking apps, such as WhatsApp, Snapchat and Instagram, that are also used as part of the process of living and reconstructing Islam online. However, navigating regulations of privacy when conducting research on these technologies will be complex. Although the Internet allows us to view religious practices in new forms, my research shows that certain tools on social media can restrict a researcher’s observations: comments and key words can be filtered and disabled, followers and advertisements can be purchased and users can limit their online interactions, showing only those behaviours that fit a persona that their audiences deem acceptable (Chapter Five, Section 5.8.4). It is important for social researchers to be aware of these processes as it can limit our understanding of lived religion. Incorporating analysis of video blogs by young religious actors partly helped me to overcome this challenge, as I could view naat reciters activities ‘behind the scenes’; seeing what events they perform at, where they travel to and insights into their leisure and social lifestyles, whilst also having a broader awareness that this data is also public and may be manipulated to omit profane activities.

7.3.2 Online research methods

As discussed in Chapter Three, this study is one of the first in the sociology of religion to have incorporated the social media analytical tools provided by NVivo v.11. I can therefore provide preliminary insights into the advantages and limitations of this software and the implications it may have for future researchers on cyber religion. The auto-coding features used for social media data analysis can produce large datasets for researchers to quickly deduce different users’ biographical information (see Chapter Three, Section 3.3.2), in order to infer the types of audiences that are engaging in an activity online. It can also generate the Facebook page categories to see the genre of activities users participate in, as well as produce quantitative
data on the number of page likes/followers of content creators. However, this also runs the risk of providing an influx of unnecessary, excessive data and determining its relevance can be an arduous process.

Additionally, social media analysis does not consider ‘fake’ or dummy accounts, where users may provide false demographical or background information. It is therefore important to supplement this research with direct analysis, whereby the researcher views, reflects on and analyses religious activities in the form of fieldnotes, that are subsequently coded, to comprehend the relationships between different themes that emerge from the dataset. This produces a form of netnography. The unique ways of accessing social media data and handling anonymity offered in this study can be referred to in Chapter Three.

3. What does the new Sufi phenomenon tell us about religious engagement amongst young British Muslims?

7.4 Generation M: changing the Sufi landscape

In Chapter Three, I discussed how the theoretical underpinning of this study is premised on everyday lived religion. Therefore, when designing my methodology, I incorporated informal interviews with participants, which allowed unrecorded (e.g. via dictaphones), open-ended spoken questions and discussions. For younger interlocutors, this method provided rich insights into their worldviews, motivations for attending the centres, religiosity, social lifestyles and identities, as they were more comfortable sharing their thoughts informally with someone with visibly shared characteristics and demographics. The data provided by pre-existing interview questions can be constraining, whereas in observations and informal interviews, personal conversations emerge more organically. For this reason, the absence of recorded interviews should not challenge the methodological rigour in understanding young Muslims religious engagement, and I can provide insights ex ante.

“Sufism today remains a popular form of Islam. Traditional orders, neo-Sufi organisations, people whose beliefs and practices are Sufi-influenced, who have no formal association with Sufism, are found in every Muslim-majority state and non-Muslim majority states as well” (Bennett 2017a, p.6).
Changes in Sufi expression amongst young British Muslims do not exist in a vacuum, and occur in the face of wider, global religious and sociological trends, that are also manifest amongst other faith and New Age spiritual communities. This confirms findings on the ways in which modernity has been a causal factor for religious change in the UK (see Chapter Two). There are similar overarching conditions that create new forms of religious expression amongst young British Muslims. In the literature review, I questioned the extent to which new Sufi activities have been impacted and inspired by the New Age movements (Howell 2007). As both operate through a modern form of religious experimentation, there is some discernible overlap (see Sutcliffe and Bowman 2000). Young Muslims participate in Sufism in a ‘spiritual milieu’ which caters for ‘self-spirituality’, where they can construct individualistic religious packages and draw upon multiple traditions based on their own preferences (Houtman and Aupers 2010, p.5). Sufi expressions align with sociological theories in the study of contemporary lived religion, where people are ‘multiple seeking’ in the ‘religious market’, as they come and go without any formal commitment (Sutcliffe and Bowman 2000; Sutcliffe 2003; Aupers and Houtman 2006; Davie 2015).

Wider trends and changes in the sociology of religion in Britain are being reflected within the microcosm of Sufism. There is also a,

“Broad transition within Sufi movements from being the core of old-fashioned popular Islam to being important vehicles for the expression of new styles of popular or mass Islam in the context of modern and modernising societies” (Voll 2007, p.298).

The religious roots of Islam in Britain emerged from the Barelvi and Deobandi traditions, that accentuated rulings of austere religious discipline, in response to the encroachment of colonial powers in the Indian subcontinent (Metcalf 2002; Metcalf 2009). My findings suggest that young Muslims have shouldered the social and religious responsibility of upholding the future of their faith, by contextualising Islam in their current sociological milieu (Seddon and Ahmad 2012). This has resulted in the “growth, maturation and indigenisation of Islam in Britain” via “religious entrepreneurship, social networking sites and faith-sensitive services” forming a British Muslim culture (Hamid 2011, p.258).
“Most young Anglo-Asians have now become sophisticated cross-cultural navigators, such that they can manoeuvre their way with just as much ease through arenas structured in terms of their parents’ cultural conventions as they do in those where they are expected to conform with those deployed with members of the dominant majority” (Ballard et al. 2006, p.181).

As subsequent British-born Muslim generations increase in the UK, old forms of tradition are mutating. New forms of religiosity are developing in the British context, reflecting the social and religious context of wider society. Moreover, people who are not ‘traditional’ religious scholars now play an increasingly visible and important role in shaping religion and, in this case, Sufism in Britain (Voll 2007, p.286).

Where Sufi engagement was previously an active quest for spiritual meaning, today people can just happen to stumble upon Sufism when searching for contemporary expressions of Islam, including through arts and creativity. There is a difficulty in transmitting Sufi historical traditions through post-*tariqas*, as they are not always officially affiliated to any particular modes of understanding (such as one Sufi order or denomination). Their diverse religious teachings allow audiences more freedom to express individual modes of religiosity. This provides a moral and intellectual justification for some people to not adhere to customs that come from stricter group affiliations.

Some people may more likely be inclined to practice Sufism in this way, as it gives them some legitimacy to be relaxed in their approach to religious practice and this is perceived to be more agreeable to a social liberal context. The broader climate of late modernity in Britain has impacted contemporary Sufism, and unconsciously Sufi organisations attempt to become agreeable to the consumer culture. In this context, Sufism is relegated to different forms. Sufi *tariqas* require individuals to limit themselves to association with one *shaykh* and/or Sufi order, which reduces their choice of spiritual engagement. However, in post-*tariqa* spaces individuals are not limited by one mode of religious expression and they can participate in Islam across denominational borders, that have previously alienated Muslims in Britain from one another (McLoughlin 2005; Ansari 2007). For scholars in British Muslim studies, this shift shows that where existing Muslim congregations or institutions fail to meet their
requirements, young Muslims will create and search for supplementary outlets to the mosque or tariqa.

It is important that researchers understand that there is a diverse spectrum of different types of Sufi manifestations, that are being used for different purposes. Levels of piety and adherence to Sufism also vary on a person to person basis, especially as much emphasis is placed on niyyah. Naat khwaani is a form of preserving Ahl as-Sunnah activities, whilst in other settings, such as, parks wedding halls and birthday parties, the reciters can be considered artistic entertainers, who also bring barakah to the space (see Open Call event, Chapter Six, Section 6.3) This conveys the popularity of established Sufi practices – even in settings that are not ostensibly religious. Halal entertainment is partly emerging from idealised Sufi practices. Ironically, some people are turning to forms of pleasure and enjoyment, instead of following the teachings of which Sufism was historically premised upon, such as asceticism and renouncing their desires.

These young Muslims are showing new ways on how to be trendy or ‘cool’ whilst drawing on the values or practices of Sufi-Islam, their parental cultures, fashion, Western lifestyles and wider youth cultures (Khabeer 2016).

“Nevertheless these trends are here to stay and may perhaps influence wider cultural attitudes, religion and economics. The emergence of this new generation of British Muslim cultural producers, artists and change-makers reflects patterns across the globe in which a growing, young, educated middle-class is shaping the cultural tastes and consumption patterns for Muslims who aspire to be successful, influential and cool (Hamid and Lewis 2018, p.211).

Religious centres are also becoming a part of the edutainment industry – that is delivering educational learning whilst providing entertainment and a place to ‘hang out’ (Hamid and Lewis 2018). As meta-religious, mixed spaces, post-tariqas are co-opting Sufism to provide a supplementary outlet to the existing Islamic infrastructures, that have been previously dominated by first and second generation Muslims. The transmission of Islam is taking part through multiple religious actors. Where young Muslims may be constrained by time and
money to enrol onto the six-year *dars-i nizami* programme or may lack in the institutional discipline of a *tariqa*, they can now join ‘bite-size’ courses for confessional learning. This option for people to pick and choose may create limitations to their levels of commitment and dedication, or it may enhance their learning due to the wider ranges of options now available. Gender boundaries are more fluid and egalitarian in Sufi-inspired organisations, with more opportunities for females to get involved in leadership.

### 7.5 Spiritual or Sufi

Sociologists of religion have sometimes conceptualised spirituality as being in opposition to religion, attributing the former as “greater authority to inner, subjective life than to outer authorities- whether social or symbolic” (Woodhead 2010, p.38). However, for my participants, Islam comprises religion and jurisprudence (*sharia*) and spirituality (*tariqa*), that are not contrasting, but are part and parcel of their faith. To this extent, Woodhead’s (2010) definition of spirituality cannot entirely account for many young Muslims’ religious experiences. This ambiguity is not merely a result of her characterisation of this term, rather for many Muslims, Sufism is an integral Islamic tradition that overlaps both definitions of religion and spirituality (see Green 2012; Knysh 2017). This was evident in my findings, where the terms ‘spirituality’ and ‘Sufism’ were used interchangeably by several interlocutors. Religion can make doctrine an obligation; whereas spirituality facilitates the individualistic search for faith that resonates with subjectivities. Religion usually requires authoritative figures for the transmission of faith, while spirituality allows for greater personal agency. Thus, Woodhead (2010, p.42) was correct in her claim that spirituality can take place in “one’s own skull”. Spirituality is about the way people ‘do religion’ and find their personal relationship with a Divine power (Spickard 2017, p.2).

Staff at RC and GH placed a greater emphasis on finding spirituality – more than Sufism – even preferring to sometimes adopt the Arabic term ‘*tasawwuf*’ instead (see Chapter Five, Section 5.10). This shift portrayed their apprehensions towards some of the connotations ‘Sufism’ held. Historically Sufis had to undergo intensive forms of abstinence and moral instruction; earning this title, rather than claiming it. Spirituality is considered a more adaptable and tolerant way of allowing people to find their own inner quest and meaning (Woodhead et al.
2003), which provides room to be more agreeable to religious differences. For British Muslims living in a pluralistic yet increasingly secular society (Davie 1994), having this leniency reduces the anxiety that the following generations will lose their connection to Islam and religious institutions. There were combined efforts by the shaykhs, organisers, scholars and performers, as well the attendees’ involvement, to (implicitly) promulgate Sufi principles and simultaneously allow individual and collective articulations of Sufi practice.

My research confirms findings from Sufism in modern Eastern contexts that,

“With public interest in things ‘Sufi’ increasingly reinforced by exposure of the new Muslim middle class and elites magazine features, visiting New Age gurus and imported growth movement programs, many highly committed ‘modern’ Muslims have sought out yet more opportunities to learn about the deeper ‘spiritual’ dimensions of their own faith through various forms of Sufism” (Howell 2007, p.231).

A key feature of contemporary religion today and post-modern individualism is the way people craft personally meaningful spiritual lives (Ammerman 2013). “The bricoleur [is] a playful explorer in a world of nearly unrestrained choices, driven by the neoliberal logics of consumerist culture” (Illman 2018, p.6). Their practices of bricolage convey “internal process of exploring ‘exotic’ aspects of one’s own religion, or an interreligious endeavour of combining religious and secular perspectives into a personal tailor-made worldview” (Altglas 2014b, pp.5–12; Illman 2018, p.6). My research shows young British Muslims adopt bricolage as a form of modern individualism (Chapter Six, Section 6.8.2). As found in previous research, this creates an eclectic and personal form of religiosity, by drawing on an array of secular and sacred resources and reconstituting, or using them, for religious purposes (Altglas 2014b).

The concept of ‘spiritual but not religious’ (Davie 1994; Taylor 2007; Watts 2018a) does not apply for young Muslims, as they consider both dimensions essential rudiments of Islam. Sufism has always been a diverse tradition with many different paths, that has enabled an individualistic expression of spirituality through: purification of the heart, sincerity in intention, dreams, spiritual experiences and syncretic practices (Gabriel and Geaves 2014a). For many young Muslims, spirituality is about ‘living’ their religion and journeying towards
proximity to God, through implementing faith in social and mundane activities. They construct their own meanings and ways of understanding their religious experiences (Beckford 2003, p.193). Therefore, for sociologists of religion, definitions of ‘spirituality’ and ‘individualism’ need to account for Muslims who navigate their faith whilst living in modern Western contexts.

In the literature review, I questioned to what extent collective Sufi practices still occur or whether they are becoming more individualised. My findings confirm Wilke's (2013) understanding of contemporary Islam being both collective and individualistic. What can be understood as ‘individualism’ amongst young British Muslims, is even though they may engage in communal or collective practices, they find forms of religious expression that are linked to their own understanding of spirituality and belief. Through this they embrace personal approaches to faith. This includes the freedom to pick and choose between different religious groups and shop for more convenient forms of religion for additional support and leisure.

Generational shifts are reflected in the adaptation of new forms of religious engagement. A unique contribution of my research is that it conveys how young Muslims religious engagement is ‘fluid and faithful’. In post-tariqa contexts people are free to choose aspects of Sufism and embed them in their pre-existing lifestyle preferences; whereas Sufi tariqas have a more robust, well-defined template of following the Sufi path. They seek Islamicised forms of halal entertainment as a substitute for popular culture that goes against the teachings of Islam, listening to naats as an alternative to secular music, or attending the film club at RC instead of going to the cinema. They are torn by competing influences in their lives, and the extent to which they adopt religiosity or recreation is mediated by their individual personalities and the extent to which they consider the importance of Islam in governing their lifestyles.

Nonetheless, young Muslims who attend these centres, want to feel assured they are part of an authentic, shared religious community, without feeling the pressure of being overly regulated. Young Muslims want to seek out religious authorities to feel assured they are upholding an authentic, and even at times, orthodox, spiritual traditions, but they also want
to follow religion in a way that is convenient and enjoyable. In my findings, there seemed to be a search for encouragement and approval, so that they would be welcomed and accepted, in case they made mistakes or openly sinned (see Chapter Six, Section 6.8.1).

“People bring the expectations developed in contemporary media culture to their spiritual lives. They seek to develop and articulate individualised spiritual identities and practices, to come together in networks around shared values and creative projects, and to be engaged by leaders in less hierarchal and in more conversational ways” (Ritter and Mahan 2016, p.39).

In this approach to accessing Sufism, many people do not want to be considered ‘Sufis’, as this title would bring with it an expectation to uphold a responsibility of following Sufism/Islam in its entirety, but want to live and practice those aspects that align with their lifestyle choices and allow them to be themselves. It seems very fitting that Jackson (2014, p.65) linked this notion to Kierkegaard’s belief that spirituality means accountability, whereas “much of modern spirituality seems little more than pick-and-mix spiritual shopping and a way of avoiding conviction and existential concerns”.

Young Muslims’ consumer choices do not seem superficial, rather there seemed to be a deep sincerity in wanting to learn more about Islam. There are varied factors in the motivations behind why people are coming together, and my data suggests people seemed to have a longing for a religious environment and a space in which they could find commonality, where they can meet other young Muslims who have combined interests. Young Muslims’ religious decision-making, whilst individualistic, seems to be in search for a spiritual community and longing for an environment that connects them to Islam. This is why they are finding more time for religion by attending supplementary classes in the evenings and weekends and seek a sense of community in their choices of friendship and socialisation.

Although I have had little room to explore this in my finding’s chapters, in my data there has been evidence of a nostalgia and longing for a world of simplicity – whilst having their basic needs met – perhaps not in the same way as minimalism, but by wanting a life of unaffected devotion to God.
“For Sufism, however, the appeal to something beyond reason is hardly novel, leaving us to wonder whether it is a quest for postmodern reenchantment both in the West and more broadly that provides an opening for Sufi-influenced reengagements with Islam, especially within Muslim youth cultures” (Hermansen 2014, pp.205–206).

It is my conjecture that this type of romanticism is a craving for a distant Islamic past, where Islam was a way of life and not something that had spatial or temporal restriction. It was not limited to evening madrassa hours nor the Friday congregation. Sufi teachings, paraphernalia, and Islamic music helps manage this discontentment as shown in a previous study,

“By contrast, the appeal of Sufi music in the West stems largely from the bourgeois search for meaning in a capitalist society in which basic material needs have largely met, and in which a certain spiritual-aesthetic longing, pointing nostalgically or creatively outside of this system, remains unfulfilled” (Frishkopf 2009, pp.69–70).

7.6 North vs South

Although it was not the objective of this study, by choosing two Sufi-inspired organisations in the North and South of England, I was interested to see whether there was a ‘North-South’ divide in religious engagement. During six months of ethnography, there was not enough information to see whether this binary exists, however I can provide preliminary insights, and further research is needed to substantiate this. In RC, many of the attendees visit from in and around London, including university students who had moved to the region from other parts of the UK. As a capital city, it has a larger economy, attracts more diasporic communities and holds larger multifunctional communal organisations to meet the needs of a growing population.173

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173 See Office for National Statistics. ‘Regional economic activity by gross domestic product, UK: 1998 to 2018’ (2019). Table 1: London has approximately 20% of the UK’s total GDP (p.3). Table 2: Comparison with other UK capital cities. It’s population is significantly higher (p.5). Also see, Gov.uk – ‘Ethnicity Facts and Figures’ (2019): https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest Section 2 shows London has a much higher proportion of ethnic minorities than the rest of the country. Also see, ONS paper ‘Overview of the UK population: August 2019’ (2019). Figure 2. London and the South East have larger population growth rates. This varies within London as
This diversity also contributes a broader awareness of different cultural and religious practices. As shown in Chapter Two, much of the literature in British Muslim studies has looked at Muslim settlement in the UK amongst migrant communities who transfer religious practices from their places of origin (Geaves 2000; Ansari 2004; Gilliat-Ray 2010). At RC participants’ ethnic backgrounds are much more varied with many people claiming their parents were from two distinct cultures. These differences result in adopting mixed religious-cultural heritages and practices, and therefore sectarian identities are not so apparent. RC allows people to embrace their differences and practice religion according to their own understanding.

In GH, there is a British-Pakistani majority and staff place a stronger emphasis in aligning with the practices of the Ahl as-Sunnah. Although Manchester is a major UK city, it is smaller in comparison to London, and many commuters will travel from nearby towns to access employment and civic organisations.\(^{174}\) This was the case for many of my participants who were commuting to attend events at GH. Although people have a range of options to engage with Islam on the Internet, in towns traditional communal networks and inherited religious practices seem to be more intact. They are therefore less likely to diverge from established religious traditions. The implication of this research for scholars in British Muslim studies indicates that we need to be more sensitive to regional variations, and the ways in which local communities shape religious behaviour and attitudes. More research is also needed on the differences in religious practices within UK geographical towns, cities, and rural areas, suggesting the potential contribution of further social geographic work in this field (Jones 2010; Jones 2012).

These spaces are ‘post-ethnic’, as defined in earlier research.\(^{\text{well, with areas with higher concentrations of ethnic minorities having higher population birth rates (p.5) last accessed 29/03/2020.}}\)

‘A new sort of “post-ethnic” tariqa is now emerging in the West that appeals to well-educated Westerners irrespective of their ethnic background’ (Sedgwick 2016, p.250).

Sufism is popular because it enables identity forms that mediate religious and Western modes of expression, which can be synthesised, without conflicting with one another. Sartorial choices are a visible way of people inscribing intersecting, syncretic identities upon themselves. Where followers of particular Sufi tariqas can sometimes be recognised by turban styles, colour of clothing and even by the length of their beard, young Muslims in post-tariqa spaces fuse Western clothing with markers of eastern and religious cultures, even augmenting these with paraphernalia. This conveys both religiosity and embeddedness in British society. Islam in Britain is slowly becoming indigenised, through the formation of a new British Muslim culture. That is, a hybridisation of elements of British culture and parental heritages, merged with global Muslim religious traditions.

7.7 Conclusion

In summary, this research dismantles metanarratives and reified conceptions of Sufism, by observing the ways young Muslims live and (re)construct Sufism in contemporary Britain as polymorphous communities via qualitative and digital methodologies. Muslim communities endeavor to make a place for themselves within British society, and although progress appears to be slow, there are already spaces that the current and next generation will make use of, to increase participation in society, in order to ensure a place for Islam (Joly 1995, p.23).

Previous frameworks on religious change and consumption in the UK have not entirely considered young people’s engagement with Islam in Britain. I have used the theoretical frameworks of religious change in consumer societies, paired with an innovative methodology, to conceptualise ‘post-tariqa’ Sufi expression. As a cutting-edge study of Sufism in Britain, I have uncovered a rapidly changing religious scene, which has uncovered new forms of Sufi expression that came to emerge, or increase in popularity, in the last five years, or less. Post-tariqa organisations are not symbolised by domes and minarets and neither can attendees be recognized through uniforms or religious attire. Therefore, researchers must
consider the myriad settings where Islam is negotiated and accessed, beyond the visible infrastructures. Although I have created, and extended, typologies to help conceptualise some of these changes, there is no one taxonomy that can recognise Sufi engagement in Britain, and my study presents the multifarious, dynamic ways Sufism operates in physical and virtual platforms. In the final chapter, I will provide a reflective account of the entire research process and how it has shaped my personal understanding of Sufism in Britain.
Chapter Eight – Conclusion

8.0 Introduction

\textit{Tariqat be juz khidmat-e khalq nist
Be tasbih o sajjada o dalaq nist
The Path (Sufism) is not other than service of people
It is not in the rosary beads, the prayer mat or the Dervish cloak
-Shaykh Sa’di.}

(Quote found in Khan 2006, p.16).

At the beginning of this thesis, I shared parts of my biography; my personal journey with Islam as a young Muslim living in Britain, and the Sufism I encountered through history, both in books and \textit{kalaams}, and within my ancestry through the story of my great-great-grandmother. I started this research with some of my own questions in mind, to explore the extent to which Sufi teachings were implemented in people’s lives, and how these traditions were maintained when transplanted into modern contexts. Are Sufi principles still upheld through asceticism and renunciation of the self, as taught in classical texts and in the examples of the stories of the Awliya, or is there a shift in the way people find proximity to the Divine? Are they finding a new, more individualistic, path that suits their lifestyle preferences? The answer is still ambiguous.

So is contemporary Sufism sincere endeavour and spiritual probity, or simply individualised (or even ‘selfish’) religious decadence infused with the very materialism that classical Sufism has typically renounced? If I put on my sociologist of religion hat – or hijab – I am left optimistic that young Muslims will in some way retain their religious traditions, even if they must reconstruct them. But as a practicing Muslim, and as someone who was taught classical Sufi teachings growing up, I feel disheartened; aspects of contemporary popular Sufism in Britain seem to be losing the very essence that once made it distinctive. I share Pattison’s view that,

“‘Spirituality’ seems to function like intellectual Polyfilla, changing shape and content conveniently to fill the space its users devise for it...I find it difficult to see much future or
lasting value for floating spiritualities divorced from communities of practice and discourse where they have been tested and refined over centuries” (Pattison 2001, p.37 cited in Gilliat-Ray 2003).

Sufism is something that should be sought, and is a path filled with struggle, not something that should be made available to everyone. I am left both sceptical and optimistic, due to the disparity between my own knowledge and experiences of Sufism which were more ‘elite’ than ‘popular’. I have learnt that my field sites are useful spaces as an introduction to Sufism, and to find an alternative social space, through which one can access social Islamic activities. However, it has accentuated the importance of preserving Sufi tariqas, as it has taught me that Sufism is tazkiya, and tazkiya cannot be undertaken without the medium of a true shaykh.

8.1 Methodological reflections

Sufism is embedded within mainstream Islamic practices. The question remains: Whose understanding of Sufism do we as researchers consider reliable...is it the audiences who believe they are engaging in an authentic practice, or the history by which the tradition is defined? As Woodhead wrote in an earlier study,

“Even today, vast areas of religious, sacred and ritual experience are routinely ignored or dismissed as ‘fuzzy’, insubstantial, and lacking in salience because they do not conform to the lineaments of what a dominant consensus considers ‘real’ religion” (Woodhead 2010; Woodhead 2013, p.11).

Moreover, as researchers we are limited by our observations of people’s behaviour in particular settings, and in the case of the online realm, we only have a snapshot of the lives of religious actors that they choose to share. This cannot be completely reflective of their true thoughts, experiences and engagement with religion and spirituality. We can study their social behaviour and interpret what we see, but we cannot assume to know their internal spirituality. This can sometimes hinder our understanding of lived contemporary Sufism, as Sufism is arguably more of an internal practice than an external ‘performance’.
As a young Muslim researcher, I cannot ignore the voices I hear from amongst the religious communities, both which I am a part of and in where I am conducting research. I was often made aware of some of the inappropriate practices that some (self-acclaimed) religious celebrities or influencers were engaging in that went very much against the teachings of both Sufism and Islam. This left me quite perplexed, I was conducting research about some people’s perceived religious practices, and yet outside of this religious display there was something almost narcissistic in the way in which some people were manipulating their audiences, particularly young female followers, in the name of faith. This disappointment reminded me of Hadhrat Ali Hujwiri’s Sufi opus, the ‘Revelation of the Veiled’, Kashf ul Mahjoob, as I was reminded that such charlatans have existed since the early days of Sufi history. Morality and character are thus useful hallmarks in assessing people’s religious authenticity. This social psychology of religion may seem irrelevant to some sociologists of religion who are more concerned with people’s observed behaviours, however for the study of Sufism in particular, people’s internal and external practices have to correlate for them to be conscientious and sincere, as this is the epitome of the spiritual path. It is this internal reflection that is part of tazkiya, and through this one becomes God-fearing (muttaqi).

On further reflection of the research process, I intentionally steered clear of making overly ambitious statements that claim to speak for the experiences of all young Muslims. My personal biography was a significant factor in shaping my methodology for researching everyday lived religion. Some people had recognised me from previous events, or we shared mutual acquaintances. In this way, I felt they shared their genuine opinions and trusted that I would keep their identities anonymous.

When designing the methodology, I substituted structured interviews for informal conversations, in order to gather more natural responses from my participants (see Chapter Three, Section 3.6.1). However, whilst writing up my findings I felt interview data could have helped me to understand more about young people’s religious identities and levels of commitment to Sufism. In some ways, this sheds light on our limitations as social researchers. Organic, ordinary conversations can occasionally reveal more about people’s lived experiences, as participants can share their thoughts comfortably without feeling the pressure of being recorded or having their words scrutinised. As social researchers, we must
consider this approach, especially when conducting research amongst younger participants in order to have a better representation of their views. However, as scholars we are limited on how much value this data holds due to its methodological precision, as these conversations are not always verbatim and therefore may rely on the researcher’s interpretation. Social media research methods are a recent development in the sociology of religion, and by incorporating this methodology into this study, it allowed me to analyse non-institutional, everyday Sufi expression. It revealed Sufi expression and comments about religion as vernacularised by the online respondents.

This was an ambitious project that delivered very large and distinctive datasets, in order to demonstrate the extent of changes in Sufi expression the current British landscape. As I had incorporated ethnographic and netnographic methods, there were a myriad of similarities and differences in online and offline religious expression, and these complexities convey the polyvalence of Sufism today. The flexible and changing nature of contemporary Sufism can become quite frustrating for scholars in religion who attempt to place people in fixed categories in an attempt to understand the groups’ teachings/rigour and their audiences levels of commitment (Jackson 2014). For young people, their social and religious experiences are so complex that we cannot classify their behaviours simplistically.

There were a few points of analysis that were left uncharted or that could have been elaborated further, such as positioning, jokes/laughter, and multi-tariqa activities. These themes can be followed up in journal publications, as there was limited scope to include all of these within this thesis. Most of these categories would not have made a substantial contribution to the sociology of religion and would be best suited towards studies in religion and theology.

Prior to the completion of this thesis, Rumi’s Cave have since expanded their facilities and shifted to a new and bigger space through the financial support of a larger Muslim charity (Penny Appeal). This again portrays the rapid-changing religious landscape in Britain, continually evolving, responding to new social needs. I originally began using the phrase ‘The Cave’ when referring to Rumi’s Cave, as it was often used by my participants, before stumbling across another organisation created in the heart of Birmingham last year (2019),
with the same name, and with similar aims to provide young Muslims a spiritual and creative post-ethnic space to freely express their religious identities. This reinforces the claim I make throughout this thesis, that many of these Sufi-inspired outlets are responding to the growing demographic of young British Muslims who face specific social and internal pressures, to reclaim their faith and create an alternative religious-cultural experience, that is both global and British.

I have carefully deliberated on the views of my participants and their thoughts on the contribution of this thesis (Brettell 1996; Davies 1999). I am sensitive to whether they feel I have represented them in the most accurate way. My participants may not quite appreciate the entrepreneurial dimensions of my analysis, but my intention was to draw upon the different datasets and use the theoretical approaches as a prism to frame my findings. The entrepreneurial dimension of Sufism may be perceived pejoratively as the secular impinges on the sacred, however it helps capture the nuances of Sufi engagement vis-à-vis the wider consumer landscape. They may also feel disappointed on the lack of theological input however I hope they are reassured by the sociological nature of this study. I am optimistic that the theoretical lens of this study will perhaps reveal to them new ways of understanding contemporary Sufi engagement through the eyes of a Muslim researcher.

Through the process of this study, I have developed a strong skillset in research and a refined application of different methodologies. This has led to opportunities of conducting fieldwork and research inquiries in other domains. I have also used my knowledge to teach undergraduate and postgraduate students and staff on how to develop their research skills and subsequently analyse ethnographic and netnographic data on the NVivo software. I have found my passion in applied social research and aim to use this to make a meaningful contribution in teaching, policy and amongst grassroots communities. I thoroughly enjoyed the research process and what motivated me throughout these years was my enthusiasm for this subject. I wanted to make a substantial contribution to Sufi Studies to update the knowledge in this field. This thesis is one of the largest studies on contemporary Sufism in Britain and the only ethnographic study of post-tariqa Sufism. I hope that it inspires scholars to recognising the diverse spectrums of Sufi engagement in everyday spaces.
8.2 Final reflections

This thesis does not account for every young person’s interaction with Sufism. It provides an insight into changes in religious infrastructures, such as the development of post-\textit{tariqa} movements, to observe how young British Muslims retain their religious traditions, whose national identities are just as much, if not more, significant to them than their ethnic identities.

\textit{Post-tariqa} fraternities do not exist in a vacuum; they are well thought out organisational structures that have been born out of their social context. The role of the \textit{shaykh} in providing new forms of spiritual direction has emerged through an evaluation of past and future forms of religious leadership: those that have worked previously and the changing needs of a growing youthful demographic of British Muslims who will be pioneers of religious change in the upcoming decades. These changes also suggest that we may find a decline of sectarian influences in Sufi activities within post-\textit{tariqa} spaces.

Sufism in Britain has commonalities with modern American Sufi communities, mostly due to shared sociological factors, which include the Internet and consumerism, in an increasingly capitalist society (Dressler 2009; Dressler 2010; Hermansen 2014). For example, although many people are members of \textit{tariqa}, initiation is not always a prerequisite to make contacts with certain Sufi groups, and outreach work has become a public endeavour to engage other communities, through inter-faith dialogue and social action (Dressler 2010).

“For some Sufi seekers, Sufism is only a transitory path, and they eventually turn away from Sufi practice and continue their religious life in non-Sufi (and sometimes non-Muslim) communities. Many wandering as well as transient Sufis appear to be searching for an ideal spiritual and social fit” (Dressler 2010, p.447).

My findings reveal how young British Muslim religious identities are impacted by various social, economic and religious factors. The pecuniary element came as an unexpected, incidental finding, which was a fascinating lens through which I could analyse how Sufism is becoming commercialised in relation to its consumer setting. A further unintentional, yet
beneficial outcome of this research, is that it has provided preliminarily insights into Muslim consumer markets in the U.K., and how this may contribute to halal lifestyles. Although most of the contributions of my offline field sites are charitable in nature, their timetable of activities is reflective of the forms of entertainment young British Muslims seek, and how they are using spiritually-infused activities to diversify this sector. Whilst this can partly inform policy on Muslim charitable contributions and entrepreneurship, a further implication of my research is more studies are needed in this field. This is also something that is being recognised by other research bodies, such as the APPG British Muslims who are currently compiling a report on British Muslim contributions to enterprise and entrepreneurship in the UK.175

Lastly, it is important to recognise that there still exist tariqa formations that are beyond the researcher’s gaze. These are often more emblematic of the Sufi path in its requirement of sobriety and austere devotion, where researcher access would be either limited, or impossible. As I have been taught by my teachers, God wants to protect His Awliya from the pестering of today’s day and age, and so he makes them obscure from the people. And often, none but the Awliya, and He who made them amongst His Friends, can recognise a Wali.

“Oh Khusrau, the river of love
Runs in strange directions.
One who jumps into it drowns,
And one who drowns, gets across.”
—Amir Khusrau.

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YQNC Facebook. [https://en-gb.facebook.com/YouthQuranNaatCouncil/](https://en-gb.facebook.com/YouthQuranNaatCouncil/)

Appendices

Appendix One: Ethics approval form for online and offline research

Approved by School of History, Archaeology and Religion (SHARE), Cardiff University.

SCHOOL OF HISTORY, ARCHAEOLOGY AND RELIGION
RESEARCH AND TEACHING ETHICAL APPROVAL FORM

To Be Submitted in hard copy to the School’s Ethics Officer: Dr. Maria Fragoulaki, School of History, Archaeology & Religion, John Percival Building, 5.01 (FragoulakiM@cardiff.ac.uk)

Note: The form must be accompanied by any necessary documentation applicable to the project (e.g. consent forms, permissions etc.)

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<th>Principal Investigator / Supervisor</th>
<th>Prof. Sophie Gilliat-Ray and Dr. Mansur Ali</th>
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<tr>
<td>Student Name &amp; Number (if applicable)</td>
<td>Ayesha Khan (C1644001)</td>
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<td>Email Address</td>
<td><a href="mailto:KhanA43@cardiff.ac.uk">KhanA43@cardiff.ac.uk</a></td>
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<td>Title of Project</td>
<td>Contemporary Sufi expression amongst young British Muslims</td>
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<td>Purpose of work proposed i.e. teaching, undergraduate project, postgraduate project, externally funded research, commercial research</td>
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Supervisor Signature

PLEASE REFER TO THE FOLLOWING BEFORE FILLING OUT THE REST OF YOUR APPLICATION:

1. The School Research Ethics webpage can be accessed via: http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/hsar/research/ethics/index.html
2. Information on data management, collecting personal data: data protection act requirements can be accessed via the Staff Intranet of Cardiff University: https://intranet.cardiff.ac.uk/
   Log into Intranet/Research Support/Research Integrity and Governance/Research Ethics/Ethical Review/School Research Ethics Committees
3. Ensure attachment of the following with your application:

   a. Full project proposal
   b. Participant information form and Consent form (if available)
   c. Copies of all relevant permissions (if applicable)
   d. Details concerning external funding (if applicable)
### Recruitment Procedures

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| 1 | Does your project include children under 16 years of age?  
(There may be a possibility that children under 16 years of age will be present in certain gatherings, however I will be deliberately avoiding them when it comes to observations or conversations) | X |   |    |
| 2 | Does your project include people with learning or communication difficulties? |   | X |    |
| 3 | Does your project include people in custody? |   | X |    |
| 4 | Is your project likely to include people involved in illegal activities? |   | X |    |
| 5 | Does your project involve people belonging to a vulnerable group, other than those listed above? |   | X |    |
| 6 | Does your project include people who are, or are likely to become your clients or clients of the department in which you work? |   | X |    |
| 7 | Does your project include people for whom English / Welsh is not their first language? |   | X |    |

### Consent Procedures (non-archaeological)

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<td>Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Will you obtain written consent for participation?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reasons?</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Will you give potential participants a significant period of time to consider participation?</td>
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### Possible Harm to Participants

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<td>Have all measures been taken to realistically eliminate the risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort?</td>
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<td>Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing a detriment to their interests as a result of participation?</td>
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<td>Please confirm that you have read and understood CU's Interim Guidance for Researchers Working with Children and Young People.</td>
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If there are any risks to the participants you must explain in your proposal how you intend to minimise these risks. For further information regarding research ethics procedures and the University’s health and safety policies please follow the link: [http://www.cf.ac.uk/osheu/index.html](http://www.cf.ac.uk/osheu/index.html)

### Data Protection

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**Sensitive data are* inter alia* data that relates to racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, physical or mental health, sexual life, actual and alleged offences.**

### Ancient Human Remains

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### Permissions to Carry Out Fieldwork

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<td>Have you secured the appropriate permission from the tenant and landowner?</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Does the research take place outside of the UK?</td>
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<td>If “Yes” have you gained appropriate permissions?</td>
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<td>Does the area of research include any Scheduled Monuments?</td>
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<td>If “Yes” have you gained permission from the appropriate authority?</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Is the area of research special environmental interest or value (e.g., is it an SSSI)?</td>
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<td>Have you contacted the local Site and Monuments Officer?</td>
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<td>Is there an agreement in place with the legal owner of any materials recovered regarding the deposition of material culture and archive?</td>
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<td>If the material is to be deposited with another institution in due course, is this agreement in place?</td>
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**Provision against terrorism**

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<td>30</td>
<td>Have you given due regard to the “Prevent Duty”, in particular, to prevent anyone being drawn into terrorism?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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[http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/public-information/policies-and-procedures/freedom-of-speech](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/public-information/policies-and-procedures/freedom-of-speech)
When Sufi traditions transfer across different contexts and localities, there is a struggle amongst many Muslims to pass down a tradition for subsequent generations to inherit. Research on contemporary Sufism has shown how traditional modes of tariqa are now changing to adapt to a modern global context, with distinctive styles of Sufism emerging since the twenty-first century. This has given rise to multi-tariqa Sufi conferences, post-tariqa Sufi movements and different individual articulations of Sufi practice and identity. In the earlier periods, Sufism in Britain was mostly practiced within specific communities and propagated by migrants from the Muslim world. These migrants maintained the Sufi traditions of their places of origin, including their association with Sufi tariqas. However, today young British Muslims are exploring Sufism in new and innovative ways. My thesis will examine how the interaction between transnational Sufism and the sociological environment in Britain have led to new Sufi expression.

I propose two case studies of new Sufi expression amongst young British Muslims. The first looks at naat recitation on social media. As ‘Islamic music’ can be considered a form of paraliturgical worship, naat recitation is an oral and aural form of religious and spiritual practice. The second study explores non-affiliated Sufism. This is when religious people today consume the internet or move between different Sufi-affiliated organisations, as a source of religious guidance and spiritual teaching, without necessarily observing the traditions of a particular group or sect. I argue the existing research is yet to explore several themes, which are key to understanding some of the contemporary Sufi manifestations in the UK. My research hopes to fill this gap.
Please explain how the identified ethical issues will be handled. It is your obligation to bring these and any other issues not covered on this form to the attention of the Committee (please use separate sheet if necessary).

Data management

All handwritten fieldnotes and scratch notes will be stored in a locked cabinet in my residence. Typewritten fieldnotes will be saved on a password protected personal laptop and in password protected files on an encrypted USB drive. These will also be immediately uploaded onto a private OneDrive account, to secure the storage of personal records and prevent loss of data.

Data recording

Initially I will decipher what is most essential to record to best answer my research questions. This will not omit general observations, but rather guide me to provide richer descriptions where most necessary.

I will alter my data collection methods depending on the arrangements and setting within the field. Where necessary, I will write notes using a small notebook and pen, or type them on a secure laptop. During retreats or in small lectures and classes, where laptops and notepads are typically used by attendees, I can alternate my methods to see what is most appropriate for the present setting. However, in more interactive workshops and practical classes I will jot down scratch notes in a small notepad. There may also be events, such as private dhikr gatherings, where making notes can be considered inappropriate or discourteous. I would therefore note my experience from memory immediately after the occasion, or once I have left the building. As observations will provide opportunities for conversations and informal interviews, I will note anonymised verbatim accounts and summarise discussions in notebooks. These conversations will be included within my fieldnotes.

I will keep a logbook to predict how the day will be spent. At the end of the day I will record how the day actually went. I will organise my fieldnotes chronologically.
Daily activity- the type(s) of event, what happened, what was observed, who attended, what was said, types of discussions. This will include details of anything noticeably worthy of attention as well as mundane activities which may even appear insignificant.
Descriptive records- the venue/setting, scene, type of audience (sex, age, sects/denominations [if known])
Personal reflections- a journal of my thoughts on what I observed and of my participation
I will constantly document the challenges and hindrances I encounter in the field. This will note what I may have missed, what I did not have access to, what could not be captured and why.

Ethical approval will be secured by complying with the university’s regulations and through receiving clearance from the ethics committee at the School of History, Archaeology and Religious Studies (SHARE).

Participant Observation

Prior to conducting fieldwork, consent will be negotiated and agreed with the organisers. Thereafter, detailed research information sheets will be created as both posters and flyers. This will detail information on voluntary participation, consent and confidentiality. Individual consent forms will not be appropriate for this particular study, as the public audience will constantly change with the different events hosted by RC. Research information sheets will be posted on the organisations noticeboard or in the main communal area. During retreats or events held outside of the main building, flyers detailing research information will be distributed. This information will be delivered to participants to ensure transparency of the research aims and objectives, and for participants to
provide passive consent of the data collection methods (participant observation). Research information sheets will notify participants of the researcher’s presence during observations and will notify them of their option to withdraw from participating in the study at any given time. Participants will also be notified of how anonymity is handled, as this process should also be delivered with transparency (Dawson 2014). When citing material from participants, I will either use pseudonyms or quote anonymously to protect the participant’s identity. The posters will also notify participants that the data may be published and that I will be taking photographs and use verbatim quotations where necessary. Should participants not consent to any one of these, they will have the option to approach the organisers and/or to withdraw or abstain from the study.

**Online Research**

For online research and internet sources, there are problems surrounding how to represent one’s data and whether one should include direct quotations or excerpts from websites that may risk traceability of the participant. There may also be cases where individuals have not fully explored the privacy options of a social media site, or a public profile may contain comments from other users, which creates data-rich profiles of other people, largely beyond their knowledge or control. Furthermore, there are issues of what constitutes as ‘public’ or ‘private’ data, as registered users on social media can often access a different set of data than those completing a general search without logging in to a personal account.

Those who argue online social media data is public point to how these sites are free to join (almost a half of all Internet users worldwide), which is a larger potential audience than any print-based texts like newspapers or magazines that are commonly considered public. Due to the debates surrounding the ethics of the Internet and social media, there is further ambiguity to whether researchers should seek consent when quoting material found online. For those who claim social media research is public, argue users have agreed to third party access, which includes access by researchers (Townsend and Wallace 2016). However, those who dispute this, assert research ethics cannot be overlooked merely because the data appears public (Boyd and Crawford 2012). I will only access data from ‘outwardly’ public pages and social media accounts, where the privacy setting explicitly indicates the material is for public access, and where social media pages/accounts contain a following of 1,000+.

**STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL**

This project has been considered using agreed School procedures and is now approved.

Signed________________________ Print Name __________________ Date_______________
(Chair, School Ethics Committee)

Signed________________________ Print Name __________________ Date_______________
(Second Confirmation)
Appendix Two: Scanned letter of support, Rumi’s Cave

Dear Ayesha

Thank you very much for taking an interest in Rumi’s Cave for your PhD project. As discussed, we provide consent for you to carry out fieldwork observations of the various events hosted by the centre over the next academic year, for an approximate period of nine months. We understand participants will be notified of your presence and we will allow you to post a research information sheet on our noticeboard to accommodate this. I am pleased to welcome you at Rumi’s Cave and I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Kind regards

[Signature]

(P.P. Director)
Appendix Three: Research notice flyer Rumi’s Cave (to notify all participants and attendees of researcher’s presence)

Ayesha Khan is a PhD researcher at Cardiff University researching contemporary Sufism amongst the British Muslim youth. As part of her study, she will be participating and observing within some of the events held at Rumi’s Cave.

All the data and names will be anonymised, however verbatim quotes may be used where necessary. Research may be used as part of publications. Photographs may also be taken at some of the gatherings. You can withdraw from the study at any time.

If you would like to abstain from the study or do not give consent to be photographed, please contact Ayesha or the organisers here at Rumi’s.

Project Summary:

The interaction between transnational Sufism and the sociological environment in Britain have led to new Sufi expression. Through a qualitative approach, Ayesha’s study seeks to explore the contemporary Sufi manifestations amongst young British Muslims. This will contribute towards a better understanding of Islam and Muslims in Britain.

This research is being completed by Ayesha Khan.

Contact: KhanA43@cardiff.ac.uk
Ayesha Khan is a PhD researcher at Cardiff University researching contemporary Sufism amongst the British Muslim youth. As part of her study, she will be participating and observing within some of the events held at Guidance Hub.

All the data and names will be anonymised, however verbatim quotes may be used where necessary. Research may be used as part of publications. Photographs may also be taken at some of the gatherings. You can withdraw from the study at any time.

If you would like to abstain from the study or do not give consent to be photographed, please contact Ayesha or the organisers here at the organisation.

Project Summary:

The interaction between transnational Sufism and the sociological environment in Britain have led to new Sufi expression. Through a qualitative approach, Ayesha’s study seeks to explore the contemporary Sufi manifestations amongst young British Muslims. This will contribute towards a better understanding of Islam and Muslims in Britain.

This research is being completed by Ayesha Khan.

Contact: KhanA43@cardiff.ac.uk
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324
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<tr>
<td>Marriage and Romance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staff roles</td>
<td>e.g. Manager, Trustee,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership</td>
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### Appendix Six: Sample NVivo coding

![NVivo Coding Interface](image)

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<th>References</th>
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<th>Created By</th>
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<td>15 Oct 2018 at 16:07</td>
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