Codifying Emotions and Senses into Bodily Techniques: Personhood among Indian Muslims in Malaysia

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Mohammed Wasim Naser

Born in Kerala, India

I hereby confirm that this dissertation is the result of my own work and that I have only used sources or materials listed and specified in the dissertation.

Mohammed Wasim Naser

India, March 20, 2023

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Kodifizierung von Gefühlen und Sinnen in Körpertechniken: Personsein (*Personhood*) bei indischen Muslimen in Malaysia

Die vorliegende Untersuchung befasst sich mit dem anthropologischen Konzept des Personseins unter indischen Muslimen in Malaysia. Ethnizität ist häufig das zentrale Thema in Beschreibungen der zeitgenössischen malaysischen Demografie. Nach den bürokratischen Erfahrungen der malaysischen Kolonialzeit wird die Bevölkerung Malaysias grob in vier Gruppen eingeteilt: die Malaien, Chinesen, Inder und andere. Die malaiische Ethnizität ist unauslöschlich mit der Religion des Islam verbunden. Dabei dreht sich die Geschichte der indischen Ethnizität um das Narrativ der überwiegend hinduistischen Inder, die in das malaiische Land gebracht wurden, um die Arbeitsanforderungen der britischen Kolonialverwaltung zu erfüllen. Mit einer geschätzten Zahl von 700.000 in einem Land mit 32 Millionen Einwohnern nimmt das Forschungsprojekt die besondere Situation der indischen Muslime in Malaysia in den Blick, mit Augenmerk auf der Verflechtung von Ethnizität und Religion, in der indische Muslime zu muslimischen Minderheiten in einer muslimischen Nation werden. Die Arbeit untersucht die sozialen Aushandlungen, die indische Muslime führen, um sich einen eigenen Raum in einem Land zu schaffen, in dem der Islam oft mit der malaiischen Ethnie gleichgesetzt wird. Zu diesem Zweck legt die Dissertation den Fokus auf die Emotionen und Sinne, die die Gesprächsteilnehmenden als kulturelles Merkmal hervorheben.

Bestimmte "Gefühle" wurden als kulturell elaborierte Emotionen identifiziert, die sich bei einer Gruppe indischer Muslime als sozial geprägte Ausdrücke und Strategien zur Definition des Personseins herausstellten. Für eine andere Gruppe indischer Muslime sind die Sinne als Fähigkeiten, die Beziehungen strukturieren, in "Empfindlichkeiten" verschmolzen, die sich meiner Meinung nach in Personen "ablagern". Dieser dauerhafte ethnografische Fokus auf Emotionen und Sinne offenbart besondere Formen der Gesellschaftlichkeit. Gefühle und Empfindlichkeiten werden zu Aspekten sozialer Beziehungen, um das Konzept des Personenseins zu erweitern.

Ausgehend von einer Ethnographie der Gefühle und Empfindlichkeiten, werden in der vorliegenden Arbeit Emotionen und Sinne zu Techniken des Körpers entwickelt. Jenseits einer Konzeption von Emotionen und Sinnen, die erfahrungsgemäß aus dem Körper hervorgehen, verlagert sich der Fokus auf die Handlungen zwischen Personen. Dies ermöglicht uns, die Formen sozialer Beziehungen ethnographisch zu erfassen. Der Körper wird so zum Ort des Personseins und zu einem Ort, an dem es sich ausdrückt. Die Forschung beginnt also beim Körper, bei den Emotionen und den Sinnen, entwickelt sich weiter zu den Beziehungen, die sich in Raum und Zeit manifestieren, und kommt schließlich bei der Person an. Diese konzeptionelle Neuausrichtung bietet die Möglichkeit, die Feinheiten des Personseins zu erforschen, die sich durch solche "technischen Einzelheiten" des Körpers und der Beziehungen zwischen indischen Muslimen in Malaysia zeigen. Kulturelle Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede wurden daher in unterschiedlicher Weise in körperlichen Techniken, die mit Emotionen und Sinnen verbunden sind, in der Räumlichkeit familiärer Beziehungen, in temporären Vorstellungen von Zugehörigkeit und in den Reaktionen auf säkulare Regime der Moderne verortet. Das anthropologische Konzept des Personseins ermöglicht es uns, diese Unterschiede auf allen Ebenen der sozialen Beziehungen zu stabilisieren. Die Eigenschaften, die mit Techniken verbunden und im Körper verwurzelt sind, dienen dazu, das Personsein zu verkörpern und zu symbolisieren. Bei dieser Konkretisierung wurden Techniken des Körpers von den Forschungsteilnehmenden zu einer Art 'Code' zusammengefasst, indem Emotionen und Sinne zu Gefühlen bzw. Sensibilitäten 'kodifiziert' wurden. Diese gilt als eine Wissensform, derer sich die Forschungsteilnehmenden bei ihren sozialen Handlungen zutiefst bewusst waren. Doch das Bewusstsein, das durch solche kulturell ausgeprägten Emotionen und Sinne entsteht, ist viel stärker verkörpert. Diese verkörperten Aspekte sind als besondere Formen der Herstellung und Sichtbarmachung von Beziehungen beobachtbar. Durch solche ethnographischen Darstellungen und anthropologischen Analysen legt die Forschung das Konzept des Personseins dar.

Abstract

This research is an examination of the anthropological concept of personhood among Indian Muslims in Malaysia. The demography of Malaysia today is generally classified into Malays, Chinese, Indians and Others – the origins of these classifications being based upon British colonial bureaucratic practices. Although this ethnic/racial classification is often the central theme in descriptions of contemporary Malaysia, they are firmly entangled with the category of religion. The Malay race is indelibly linked to the religion of Islam, while the history of the Indian race is circumscribed around the narrative of the predominantly Hindu Indians brought into Malayan lands to fulfil the labor demands of the British colonial administration. With Indian Muslims estimated to be around 700,000 in number in a country of 32 million, this research exploits their particular entangled positionality of race and religion in Malaysia, whereby they become Muslim minorities in a Muslim nation. The research is based on fieldwork conducted among Indian Muslims in Malaysia from October 2019 to September 2020. It explores the social negotiations that they perform to carve out a space for themselves in a country where Islam is often conflated with the Malay ethnicity. For this, I focus on emotions and senses that these interlocutors singled out for cultural attention. Certain "sentiments", identified by me as culturally elaborated emotions, emerged as socially shaped idioms and strategies for defining personhood among one set of Indian Muslims. For another set of Indian Muslims, my fieldwork revealed the prominence they attached to the senses – particularly its capacity to structure social relations. Their sensorial practices were coalesced by me into "sensibilities" that I argue become "sedimented" in persons. This sustained ethnographic focus on emotions and senses disclosed particular forms of sociality. Sentiments and sensibilities become a means to expand on the concept of personhood. By developing emotions and senses into bodily techniques, the body thereby becomes the locus of personhood and a site for its expression. The proprieties attached to these techniques rooted in the body serve to substantiate and symbolize personhood for them. In this substantiation, these techniques were condensed by my interlocutors into a form of "code" – a type of knowledge that they were intimately conscious of in their social actions. Yet consciousness engendered through such culturally elaborated emotions and senses is much more embodied. Sentiments and sensibilities as codes thereby become particular ways of eliciting relations and making them visible. The research thus begins from the body through emotions and senses, progresses on to relations manifested in space and time, and then finally arrives at the category of the person. In these ethnographic illustrations and analysis, the anthropological notion of personhood allows us to stabilize cultural similarities and differences at all scales of social relations.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Primer: By Way of Introduction

Indian Muslims today form a conspicuous part of Malaysian society. The word "conspicuous" is deliberate and apt. A typical Indian Muslim "*Mamak*" restaurant is a common sight in urban Malaysia. Yet when it comes to their social identity, they seem to be caught in an entanglement. Ethnicity or race is often the central theme in descriptions of Malaysia, and there is a strong allusion to a religious subtext in this racial classification. Following the colonial Malayan bureaucratic legacy, the demography of Malaysia is broadly classified into four clusters - the Malays, Chinese, Indians and Others. While each race[1] is inscribed with its particular histories and social trajectories, the Malay race is indelibly linked to the religion of Islam and is often taken as the factor that binds their particular socio-cultural history. The Indian race, while not legally bound to any religion, is circumscribed around the narrative of the predominantly Hindu Indians brought into Malayan lands to fulfil the labor demands of the British colonial administration. This ethnic composition is deeply reflected in Malaysia's laws and Constitution, with Malays being granted special privileges. As these narratives hold considerable sway in political and academic debates, the story of Indian Muslims in Malaysia gets co-opted and finds itself conflated with what is generally seen as the story of the Indians in Malaysia.

Historically, Indian cultural influence constitutes an indelible part of Malay history which extends much earlier than European intervention in the Malay Archipelago. Indian Muslims formed a substantial part of this economic, social and cultural exchange; being primarily linked by the trading routes that followed the monsoon winds across the Indian Ocean. Estimated to

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[1] While the term race is often avoided in anthropology today, it is extensively used in popular and local discourses in Malaysia.

be around 700,000 in number in a country of 32 million inhabitants, they are mostly entrepreneurial and have been successful in carving out particular sectors of the economy for a few decades. This research engages with this particular positionality of Indian Muslims in Malaysia for an extensive anthropological examination of personhood. It explores the social negotiations that Indian Muslims perform to carve out a space for themselves in a country where Islam is often conflated with the Malay ethnicity. Predominantly ethnographic and grounded in an empirical approach based on qualitative methods of anthropology, it pursues an analysis of a hitherto unexplored yet significant aspect of personhood among Indian Muslims in Malaysia.

Field I: Laying out the Historical Field

Malaysia as a country came into being in 1957 when it was granted independence from British colonial rule[2]. The country today consists of thirteen states (*Negeri*) and three federal territories (*Wilayah Persekutuan*) between two strips of land divided by the South China Sea. The history of these lands is often conveyed through the trope of successive arrivals – the arrival of Austronesians, Sanskrit/Indic civilization, Islam, and European colonial powers. European colonial expansion in Malaya began with the Portuguese conquest of the Sultanate of Malacca in 1511, and the subsequent arrival of the Dutch. The advent of British rule began with the Singapore trade settlement in 1819 and became fortified with the Pangkor Treaty of 1874. Subsequently, the British engaged in a form of "indirect rule" as a mode of colonial government through treaties with Malay ruling elites. The sovereignty of these aristocrats was confined to matters of "Muslim religion and Malay custom" while other economic and political matters came under the dominion of the colonial bureaucracy (Hussin, 2016, p. 216). Chinese and

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[2] While Malaysia as a federal nation officially came into being in 1963, the current geographical boundaries around the Peninsula and the states of Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo Island took form in 1965 after Singapore left the federation.

Indian immigration into Malaya intensified during this period, particularly in the fields of agriculture (coffee, tea, rubber and tapioca) and mining extraction (tin, gold, copper and limestone). By the mid-19th century, rubber production had become a lucrative economy for the British[3]. Indians were believed by the British to be "docile coolies" and were encouraged to migrate on a large scale to these rubber plantations in Malaya (Iyer, 1938)[4]. They were also employed in the construction of railways and roadways in the colony. The vast majority of these labourers were lower-caste families from South India desperate for better living conditions (Arasaratnam, 1979). While there were more educated Indians who were employed in the British civil administration in Malaya, it is from this labouring class that the vast majority of Indians in Malaysia today trace their origins. They constitute around 7 per cent of the contemporary Malaysian population and are predominantly based in urban settlements of Peninsular Malaysia.

The Chinese and Indians were largely based in the British-administered Straits Settlements of Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Malacca before independence; while the vast majority of Malays were confined within the domains of the royal aristocrats, to whom the British bestowed recognition as the patrons of their Malay subjects and Islam. Most Malays thus found themselves largely restricted to rural agricultural or administrative occupations away from the rapidly expanding urban centres of these Straits Settlements. As Malaya geared up for its independence after the Second World War, there were intense negotiations over the plight of its prospective citizens. Many Malays were uneasy about the possibility of being an economically marginalized minority, while Chinese and Indian residents were concerned about their status as citizens in the new state. On the other hand, the Malay aristocrats were apprehensive over their place in a new milieu of democratic impulse and a prospective nation

[3] By 1920, Malaya supplied more than 50 per cent of the world's rubber (Sandhu, 1969, p.50).
[4] Between 1860 and 1957, four million Indians entered Malaya; 2.8 million left or were repatriated back to India, while 1.2 million died in Malaya due to diseases, malnutrition or exhaustion (Hua, 1983, p.47).

no longer controlled by the British (Fee, 1997). A compromise was reached during the drafting of the Malaysian Constitution wherein Malays, Chinese and Indians were all to be granted citizenship. The Malay "race" or "*Bangsa Melayu*" would be considered one of the indigenous populations (*bumiputera*) of the country. They were also entitled to certain privileges (*Ketuanan Melayu*) over land reservations and quotas in public sectors. These were privileges not granted to the Indians and Chinese, for whom citizenship was based on birth, duration of residence and knowledge of Malay and English. The Malay Sultans were appeased by providing them with the patronage of Islamic law in their respective states as a means of consolidating limited sovereignty over their Malay subjects.

In these negotiations, the Malay race/ethnicity was intimately tied to the religion of Islam as a means of consolidating a set of the population that did not necessarily identify as belonging to a "Malay race"[5]. As a result, the categories of "Malay" and "Muslim" increasingly became entangled such that the Malaysian Constitution underlines the profession of Islam as one of the three conditions that define a "Malay"[6]. Yet, following independence, the country witnessed a widening economic gap between the Malays and the comparatively more affluent Chinese. The "New Economic Policy" was drafted in 1971 as a response to improving the economic condition of the Malays who constituted the majority, made pressing by the infamous Race Riots of 1969. This policy was committed to increased affirmative actions for ethnic Malays, as well as eliminating the identification of race with economic function (Jomo, 2017). This resulted in a rising middle-class Malay population that was increasingly migrating to urban areas. The concurrent rise in Islamic revivalism or "*dakwah* movement" attracted such Malays confronted by a sense of alienation engendered by the rapid urbanization and industrialization

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[5] Those considered Malay today were earlier more inclined to identify themselves as belonging to the competing polities of "*Kerajaan*" (Kingdom) – under a particular "*Raja"* or "*Sultan*" as the primary object of loyalty (Milner, 1982, p.28).
[6] Article 160, cl.(2) of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia defines a Malay as "a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language… (and) conforms to Malay customs".

(Nagata, 1984). Islam began to take on a radically different dimension in Malaysia that was perhaps unforeseen during the time of the drafting of the Constitution. Beyond being a unifying ethnic criterion, Islam increasingly became a fundamental aspect of state-making. This can be observed from the formation of *Syariah* courts with the Constitutional Amendments of 1976 to its far-reaching empowerment with the Amendments of 1988, and the contemporary expansion of Islamic financial jurisdiction with the parliamentary amendments of 2009.

In this vein, Michael Peletz's works have illustrated the transformations of law in Malaysia concerning Islam and gender, while also arguing that this Islamization took on the form of a "global assemblage" that is equally influenced by modern notions of nation-state and bureaucracy (Peletz, 2018; Peletz, 2013). Maznah Mohamad explores the bureaucratization of Islam in Malaysia and argues that the ascendence of this "bureaucratic Islam" has intensified the objectification of religiosity (Mohamad, 2020, p.3). Tamir Moustafa argues that personal law in Malaysia consists of two parallel tracks of jurisdiction for Muslims and non-Muslims that have led to the "judicialization" of religion and ethnic politics (Moustafa, 2018, p.2), while Kikue Hamayotsu's work reveals the politics behind the expansion of Islamic law in Malaysia (Hamayotsu, 2013). With regard to ethnographic studies, Patricia Sloane-White's latest research provides glimpses into the workings of Islamic consciousness within corporate workspaces led by a new class of enterprising Malay Muslims benefitting from state patronage (Sloane-White, 2017). Daromir Rudnyckyj's study explores the ambitious experiments of Islamic financial experts emulating modern financial practices within the purview of the Islamic ethic of risk and profit sharing (Rudnyckyj, 2018).

It is in this context that I place my ethnography among Indian Muslims in Malaysia – an exploration of a set of communities caught in this entanglement of race and religion. Academic literatures on these communities are surprisingly few. While an Indian Muslim identity is recognized in discussions surrounding the Malay/Islam construction in Malaysia's nation-

building process, it is discussed either as a supplementary agent to make possible the emergence of the Malay/Muslim identity or as a means to demonstrate its distinctiveness. The former, for example, can be found in Ariffin's discussion on the role of the *Peranakan* community in shaping the critique of *Kerajaan* (royalty) in early 20th-century Malaya (Omar, 1993). The latter is best captured in Nagata's analysis of how "situational selection of ethnic identity" plays an important role in allowing those with mixed or migrant backgrounds to adapt to the overwhelmingly Malay/Muslim cultural context in early Malayan history (Nagata, 1974, p.343). A few studies have focused on the substantial number of Tamil Muslims on the island of Penang – some of these are ethnographic (Pillai, 2015; Nasution, 2014) while others are historical (Musa, 2013; Musa & Salleh, 2013). Other studies have analyzed Indian Muslim communities with regard to their political identity (Stark, 2006; Mushtaq, 2019). The only attempt at a comprehensive exploration of Indian Muslims that I have come across is a monograph by Farish Noor (Noor, 2013). The book is principally historical, with only the final chapter dedicated to the plight of Indian Muslims in Southeast Asia today. Since the author deals mainly with colonial archives, there is an absence of Indian Muslims as agents with a voice. With little effort to identify Indian Muslims with anything concrete, the book ultimately ends up bringing in Indian Muslims as subjects for a meta-historical and political narrative of Malay lands[7]. A final study worthy of mention is by Ravi Shankar, an unfinished doctoral thesis posthumously published that contains valuable archives and a rich collection of primary and secondary data and sources (Shankar, 2001).

The primary concern of my research lies not in historical analysis. Rather, the aim is an anthropological inquiry based on fieldwork conducted among Indian Muslims in Malaysia

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[7] Although they do not deal with contemporary Malaysia, Sanjay Subrahmanyam has provided a more sophisticated historical account that give valuable insights into the contexts of Indian Muslims in Malaya during early modernity (Subrahmanyam, 1988; Subrahmanyam, 2011). Thus, the presence of Tamils and Gujarati merchants in 16-17th century Malacca or the collaboration of Kelings or Chulias with Portuguese forces have been shown to have deep imprints on the history of the region.

from October 2019 to September 2020. The ethnography is based on two sets of communities classified according to their pattern of migration. The first set of communities is characterized by gendered migrations for enterprising in Malaysia. These communities claim their roots predominantly from the districts of Ramanathapuram and Tanjavur in the state of Tamil Nadu, as well as from the Malabar province in the state of Kerala. The second set of communities is characterized by collective family migrations due to certain socio-economic adversity back in India. They are the "Kadayanallur-Tenkasi" community in Penang and the "Malabari" community in Johor. The vast majority in of those in these communities arrived in Malaya as families in the first half of the 20th century with no possibilities foreseen at that time for a return to India. While there is a considerable number of Malaysians who claim Indian Muslim ancestry but have little social relations with other Indian Muslims, the focus of the ethnography remains on Indian Muslim collective mobilizations and the dynamics of such social relations.

Field II: Delineating the Conceptual Field

Race or ethnicity is a significant aspect of daily life in Malaysia and is frequently encountered in public and political discourses of the country. An excerpt from Judith Nagata in 1974 still reverberates to a large extent among Malaysians today:

> "One of the most salient features of modern Malaysian society is its polyethnic character which pervades most of the institutions, activities and attitudes of the population in all spheres of life. All Malaysians are, first and foremost, members of one of the three major 'races', Malay, Chinese, or Indian, and are only secondarily 'Malaysians'. It is virtually impossible to be ethnically 'neutral' by claiming no intervening ethnic status at all." (Nagata, 1974, p. 333)

During my fieldwork and while reading academic literature on Malaysia though, I could not help but feel that descriptions of race and ethnicity appeared to be oversaturated. Farish Noor raises a similar complaint that history books on Malaysia have "internalized and accepted the

logic of racial difference uncritically", which other social disciplines have taken over without interrogating its hegemonic power (Noor, 2009, p. 61). While my interlocutors were influenced by the power of these ethnic categories, the fact that they often did not place themselves within them pushed me to explore more critical approaches in anthropology. In his study on identity among the Corsicans, Candea perceptively asks whether the anthropological study of culture should necessarily be "mapped onto named groups of people", wherein differences are stabilized (Candea, 2010, p. 135). In response, Candea argues that similarities and differences emerge at different scales of relations and not just at the level of cultural/ethnic entities. In this sense, I illustrate how my interlocutors would sometimes locate similarities and differences at the level of bodily actions, while at other times do so at the scale of domestic spaces. Similarly, Strathern criticized the uncritical deployment of the concept of society as a metaphor for social organization in anthropological literature – a singular entity that performs the same functions everywhere of providing grounds for social interaction (Strathern M., 1988). Her deployment of sociality as an alternative was to recover the insights lost by analyses that employ society in such monolithic fashion (Strathern M., 1996). Being diasporic communities, the immersion into Malaysian social life varied in intensity and degree among my interlocutors that belied any attempts to demarcate a common "society" they engaged with. Personhood became a concept that I took up precisely because it could capture relations at different levels and scales, as well as complicate the individual-society binary prevalent in social analyses.

Personhood is an analytical term in anthropology that involves the interplay between the attributions that make a social "person" and the processes involved in its internalization by a "self". One definition puts it as "the emergent form of the self as it develops within a context of social relations" (Ingold, 1994, p. 744), while another lays it down as "the attainment of physiological, psychological and social competence as it is defined by a given culture" (Appell-Warren, 1988, p. 6). The study of personhood can thus be an examination of the social roles,

statuses, rights and obligations delineated for a person, or it can be an exploration of the cultural constitution of a person like beliefs or ideas about the body, soul or mind. These approaches are more often complementary and frequently lead from one to the other. Personhood provides us with a means of exploring modes through which subjects might analyze their own social lives and elicit relations from others. It is thus processual and entails a capacity for action that is enmeshed in social relations.

On investigating these aspects during my fieldwork, the prominence attached to emotions and senses among my interlocutors disclosed particular forms of sociality. I began to focus on emotions and senses and ethnographically collated them. I then developed these emotions and senses into "techniques of the body" that my interlocutors singled out for cultural attention (Mauss, 1973). Through such a technical rendering of emotions and senses, the body becomes the locus of personhood and a site for its expression. Beyond a conception of emotions and senses emerging experientially from the body, the focus shifts to what happens between persons. This provides us with a means through which forms of social relations can be ethnographically gauged. It is here that relations come to the fore in the exposition of personhood. I argue that relations can be delineated as a technology of sociality. Emotions and senses are illustrated as taking on relational capabilities through which we can analyse cultural forms. Persons conceptualized here do not exist prior to relations, rather it is their relational capacity that reproduces sociality and personhood.

Research Directions and Questionings

As diasporic Muslims in a Muslim-majority nation, there are many directions that the research could have taken. Hage claims that anthropological studies on diasporas and migrants have tended to foreground a "problem" identified by the ethnographer. This problem could be from the perspective of the migrant like racism or discrimination, or of the state like assimilation or

"brain drain" (Hage, 2021, p. 10). The research thereby acquires a "forensic ethos" of identifying injustices, which has led to generic depictions of migrants as suffering subjects or problematic objects. This impulse can be connected to Joel Robbins' larger claim that the trope of the "suffering subject" has replaced the "savage" Other in anthropological thinking (Robbins, 2013). Taking a cue from these studies, this research is not intended as a lament of the marginalization of Indian Muslims in Malaysia. Although I do not deny such tendencies, when compared to the vast majority of non-Muslim Indians in Malaysia, Indian Muslims were comparatively more comfortable in the country. Nor is the research a means of giving voice to an academically underrepresented segment of the population, or salvaging agency to a transforming culture in the face of change. Rather, I follow Hage in exploring the "cultural unity" of the diasporic experiences of my interlocutors that grant us a "milieu" from which we may analyse phenomenological states of being (Hage, 2021, p. 10). But in contrast to his approach of beginning from persons and groups to arrive at their "total diasporic reality", my approach is the other way around. Ethnography becomes a means of delineating the milieu to arrive at forms of personhood embedded within them.

With personhood as the key concept, my ethnography intends to arrive at it through a focus on the notion of the body. The analysis thus begins from the body through emotions and senses, progresses on to relations manifested in space and time, and then finally arrives at the person. This conceptual movement provides an avenue to delve into the intricacies of personhood revealed through such "technicalities" of body and relations among Indian Muslims in Malaysia. The proprieties attached to these techniques, being rooted in the body, serve to substantiate and symbolize personhood for them. I follow Lambek and Strathern's scheme here of exploring the dialectics of the embodiment of persons and the personification of bodies (Lambek & Strathern, 1998, p. 6). What features of embodied existence are singled out for cultural attention? How are emotions and senses encoded as knowledge in somatic forms? How

do relations engendered by bodily practices serve to symbolize and substantiate personhood? These underlying questions are admittedly broad, but provide us with a means of grasping the endpoint that the research intends to reach.

The following is a brief outline of the chapters in my dissertation. The next chapter is dedicated to methodological concerns, reflecting on fieldwork and the different methods employed. The subsequent two chapters are ethnographic and exploratory in nature. Chapter three takes up emotions as a means of narrating the lives of Indian Muslim family businesses. I illustrate sentiments here that operate as a powerful force of production and motivation, becoming a thread that provides a particular texture to personhood. Chapter four explores the prominence attached to certain sensorial experiences among those Indian Muslims who did not migrate for enterprising. Taken by them as the "last remnants" of their fading cultures, the chapter explores how certain sensibilities that emerge from ritual and social practices become sedimented in the person.

The ensuing two chapters are more thematic and analytically inclined towards excavating sentiments and sensibilities in particular sites. Chapter five analyses them as practices of home-making in the domestic domain. Themes of monogamy, family, "divorce as taboo" and the prominence of match-makers take the center stage here. Chapter six explores the significance of Islam in their lives, particularly how certain notions of time emerge through rituals and bureaucratic frames of belonging. Their attempts to blur the entanglements of race and religion through emotions and senses are illustrated by invoking Islamic traditions that distinguish their Indianness. These illustrations of space and time provide the backdrop for exploring emotions and senses as "techniques of the body" (Mauss, 1973) in chapter seven, which provide outlines for conceptualizing forms of personhood among Indian Muslims in Malaysia. What forms of sociality emerge from the social relations upheld by Indian Muslims in Malaysia? How do Indian Muslims process experiences and understand personhood?

Chapter II: Methodological Reflections: Ethnography and Fieldwork Considerations

Introduction

This chapter is premised on an understanding of methods as procedures for generating and comprehending data, while methodology takes on a reflective and logical consideration of these methods. Establishing a link between methods and methodology in ethnographic writing often boils down to a performative portrayal of commitment to one's research while simultaneously recognizing its limits. However, my fieldwork was characterized by an enduring apprehension over the inadequacy of methods for stimulating curiosity and surprise. My accumulation of data betrayed very few signs of being methodical or procedural. It was after fieldwork that I began to realize the relevance of methodology in ethnography. Along with the task of convincing our readers of the validity of our claims and arguments, methodology provides us with an avenue to make sense of our accumulated fieldwork experiences. We return to the basic principle that if the lives of our subjects appear messy and chaotic, it is so only in contradiction to the neat and orderly theories that we project onto the world. Methodology takes on prominence in linking descriptions and interpretations, as well as in reflecting on the techniques employed in gathering these descriptions. This chapter is thus a reflective articulation of how my field data makes sense to me.

My research initially projected one year of ethnographic fieldwork among Indian Muslims in Malaysia – from October 2019 to September 2020. With a conceptual focus on personhood in anthropology, the methods were crafted with anticipation of its legal dimensions, particularly in the domains of trade, religion and marriage. The fieldwork began as planned in October 2019, with an affiliation with the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) in the state of Selangor which provided for visa and accommodation. This luxury allowed me to travel across the country to meet different Indian Muslim communities, and hone in on a relevant

topic or idea in the first three months. By January, there was a sense of confidence regarding the direction of the research. The legal aspect was provisionally laid aside, as I felt that it required too much groundwork that might not be feasible in a year. The focus became more on the relational and bounded facets of personhood that can be tapped into through participant observation and multiple modes of interviewing. By mid-March 2020 came the Covid-19 pandemic that in many ways derailed my research, but also provided a new and productive lane of inquiry. Confined to my room and uncertain when normality would be restored, it dawned on me that my interlocutors were in a similar state that I could use to my advantage. I began writing to them extensively by reflecting on the data I had accumulated and requesting their feedback and comments. This was followed up with video and audio calls in which we discussed the vulnerabilities and ambivalence in their lives more forcefully. By June, the restrictions were eased in the country and the relationships built with my interlocutors allowed me to probe deeper into their lives, practices and experiences. This went on until late August 2020, by which time I was forced to leave Malaysia due to uncertainties with travelling during this phase of the pandemic.

The figure on the right is an illustration of how the chapter proceeds. It begins with how and why Indian Muslims in Malaysia became the research topic, followed by an exposition of personhood as the theme. Subsequently, a discussion of fieldwork is taken up that reflects on the techniques and methods used in the field. The chapter then reflects on the task of ethnographic writing and its manifold challenges. This is followed by issues of narrative and genre that ethnographic writing engenders – broader questions that allow us to re-engage with the research topic.

Delineating the Research: Genesis and Prognosis

My introduction to Malaysia was in the year 2013 when I arrived in the country for postgraduate education. Being active in student organizations and activities afforded me opportunities to interact with many Indian Muslims in Malaysia, who connected with me as a student from India. I always had an intrigue for them as a fellow diasporic Indian raised in Saudi Arabia, perceiving subtle differences in their Malaysian experiences. Beyond the university confines, Indian Muslims were conspicuous as entrepreneurs in urban Malaysia, particularly in the restaurant sector. Catering mainly to the *halal* food requirements of the majority Malay Muslim population, their menus were an eclectic mix of Indian, Malay and Chinese cuisines. Through my friends, I discovered that these restaurants were mostly run as family businesses which allowed them to manage and expand the business at an advantage. The running of these family businesses depended on certain cultural practices, particularly arranged marriages, that extended into other domains of their social lives.

By the end of my Masters degree in 2015, I took up research along with a professor at my university on a particular marketplace called "Masjid India" in Kuala Lumpur dominated by Indian Muslim entrepreneurs. Our basic interest was in the intersections of trade, kinship and political affiliations. While the research was ethnographic and limited to six months, I kept building on it in an anthropological direction – particularly concerning business and family. The indelible link that Islam had with the Malay ethnicity was found to have generated responses among these Indian Muslims, whereby the business became the site for them to negotiate and maintain their practices and traditions. My venture from economics into anthropology was stimulated by my observations of how these business practices cannot be analytically distinguished from their domestic domains. These businesses depended on marriage for expansion, as well as for financial security. Two families engaged in the same business often negotiated for marital alliances which involved investing in a new

enterprise/branch for the couple, thereby providing them with a mode of livelihood. But more importantly, it ensured a certain level of trust and commitment from the couple towards the business and the family. This also allowed them to bypass banks and other modes of financing that others in Malaysia would typically have to engage with to begin an enterprise. An observation that sparked my curiosity the most was how this created certain gender roles, values and outlooks – particularly among my friends and colleagues at the university.

Thematic Shifts: Grounding the Analysis

While kinship featured prominently in my conceptualization initially, a potential risk that I foresaw was an uncritical assumption of "cultural" values being embedded in kinship. The family was intimately tied to the economic sphere that refused any meaningful analytical separation. Taking a leaf out of Marilyn Strathern's reflections (Carsten, 2014), I shifted my research in the direction of personhood as an anthropological concept during my pre-fieldwork stage. She alludes to the sustained anthropological focus on the person in later decades of the 20th century as having led to a reconsideration of kinship, particularly bringing to the site of person what had earlier been distributed in different ways (Carsten, 2014). It provided an avenue to explain the link between the formation of such persons and the relationships and values they are embedded. This made sense for me in the context of encountering clear and articulated expectations of Indian Muslims from each other in different domains of their social interactions. These expectations were differentiated from the Others – Malays, Indians and Chinese. In particular, the expectations at home and towards the family in the extended sense were all often invoked as the boundaries that defined them. I assumed that my positionality as a Muslim from India could provide me a particular form of access in excavating the more obscure aspects of affectivity in these experiences and meanings. I was inclined to take up law as a site for ethnographically studying their particular forms of personhood. While much of

public interactions in Malaysia are predicated on ethnic or racial differentiation that hinges on certain physical attributes, Indian Muslims did not place their differences here because of the wider presence of other Indians who did not share their religion of Islam. Rather, the legal and bureaucratic contexts that often conflate the category of Islam with the Malay ethnic category was the most appealing aspect of the research for me. Notions of legal personhood regarding personal law jurisdiction between Shariah and Civil law, as well as the widespread and expansive role of Islamic banking and financing in Malaysia, seemed rich sites that could provide a thread for exploring broader notions of personhood in anthropology.

Contrary to prevalent studies on identity that are predicated on categories and boundaries, studies on personhood emphasize connections and attachments with both human and non-human entities as the point of departure (Candea, 2010). Rather than a model of the relation between parts to wholes, these approaches extend the anthropological comparison to connections and attachments that form persons. This has been attempted in anthropology by taking up various themes like aesthetics, affectivity and morality (Rasmussen, 2006); questions of embodiment and epistemology, particularly about religion (McIntosh, 2009); cultural variations in different domains of society (Piot, 1999; Strathern M., 1992); Rituals, memory and death (Battaglia, 1990); and the tide of modernity and responses it generates (Candea, 2010). On a methodological level, personhood has also engendered approaches to spatialize human experiences, while looking at extensions of personhood to non-human entities like corporations, natural habitats or spirit beings. The focus on relations also allows one certain creative license to ground ethnographic fieldwork conceptually, based on relationships built with interlocutors. The spatial aspect enables conceptualizing the place as being transformed along with persons, with the agency of these persons being extended to their capacity to be affected as well as appropriate place (Retsikas, 2007, p. 971). This is particularly critical among the diasporic Indian Muslims of Malaysia, as different modes of migration and home-making

were observed by me to have affected both the person and the place. This discussion of spatiality allows us to digress into the aspects of field and fieldwork.

The Dive-in: Tending to the Field

Classic tropes of the field often involve a naturalizing tendency whereby the subjects have to be studied in their "natural surroundings" (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997, p.7). This Malinowskian ideal has a certain enduring influence in anthropology that conceives fieldwork as a form of rite of passage (Tedlock, 1991). Yet this often brings up a bifurcation between field and home that requires tropes of entry into the field with varying degrees of surprise, agony and alienation. My case distorts many of these tropes, which admittedly have been on the wane (Appadurai, 1995). As a diasporic Indian myself with a certain level of familiarity with the Malaysian setting, the task in front of me was less a comparative exploration of cultures, but rather a reflective attempt to understand similarities and differences between my experiences and theirs. It was also not a temporal task of observing certain social change over a designated period, but rather to perform an immersion into their lived experiences like a towel gradually soaking up water. These social intercourses built simultaneously upon dialogue, social performativity, participation and observation explain the place/field only derivatively. As such, it can be argued that the field is being constructed by me through the social category of "Indian Muslim" that I have singled out to explore (Amit, 2003). My immersion early on pointed out that this category was not as homogenously conceived or easily accepted by them as I initially presumed. To start with, I underestimated the significance of those Indian Muslims who do not have a history of entrepreneurship in Malaysia. The initial three months of intense travelling and note-taking led me to the realization that the emic invocation of being an Indian Muslim depended on migratory patterns and/or modes of livelihood. This broadened my analyses significantly; the task became a more self-conscious endeavor of integrating a diffuse set of

attachments and connections bound together through a shared sense of "origin" in India and the religion of Islam.

These fieldwork encounters became a "mode of ethical engagement" (Borneman, 2009, p. 238), the accumulated experience of "being there" but "being distant" being a reservoir for me to delineate and render visible cultural differences. In this sense, I agree with Borneman and Hammoudi in foregoing irony in attributing insights gained from the field and taking seriously fieldwork and participant observation as a methodological disposition in producing knowledge. Fieldwork becomes an enduring effort to make my dwelling among my subjects intense, one that opens up aspects of their lives that would otherwise be obscure. It became a continuous process of observing, concerted listening, questioning and even writing to my interlocutors. Yet "being there" also provided more opportune moments to anticipate aspects of their lives that are not restricted to those articulated, but transcend them. A simple question of "Why should one marry?", when raised during marriage counselling or to divorced persons, would bring up emotions and reflections that would in other contexts garner responses ranging from surprise, incredulity or even a confused silence. These experiences, mediated and constituted by my interactions, involved not just discovery and surprise awaiting me, but equally my critique and ambiguity. The depth or level of interaction is a relevant case in point. Interactions among Indian Muslim businessmen were mostly in spurts and moments, who were sparing me time they considered to be valuable. As such, the possibilities for reflective conversations were more difficult here than with retired pensioners, for instance, who would actively seek me out to have a conversation. Gender and age are also crucial factors in these interactions that influence the type of knowledge that can be attained. Almost throughout my fieldwork, interactions with women were mediated by men who would have to refer me to them or join the conversation. I had been trying to gain an audience with an elderly woman in Johor during a few visits but only managed to do so when her son agreed to come along. These gendered

conversations dictate the level of emotions and sentiments that can be revealed, and that we as Muslims are expected to observe.

But more critically, these extend to the very notion of "field" in anthropology. The sense of discovery needed to be tempered with the realization that my ethnography implicitly localizes the "infinite connections and overlapping contexts" of my interlocutors "laboriously constructed and contextualized" (Amit, 2003, p. 6) for my specific references. This argument can be extended to Appadurai's claim that ethnography involves an oblique element of localization (Appadurai, 1995, p. 209) that objectifies the site and thereby plays an influential role in shaping the research. The research design, beyond an initial vague orientation, is built *a posteriori* and discovered in an open-ended immersion in the field. These realizations have led to the popularity of multi-sited ethnography, whereby the field foregoes assumptions about boundedness in favour of fluidity and attempts to follow the subjects into multiple sites (Marcus, 2009). These sites would arguably broaden horizons and provide better possibilities to grapple with increasing complexities in the field.

It is with these inclinations that I began my fieldwork in October 2019 in a familiar field yet trying to defamiliarize myself, cast aside my assumptions and arouse curiosity in everything connected to Indian Muslims. Two months into the fieldwork scurrying after every thread that came my way, I came to realize that I had to cast the net where the fish would be, and not on each wave that surfaced. Boundedness suddenly became an analytical virtue. Circumscribing my field allowed me to highlight the partiality and fissures more clearly in contradiction to any effort towards holism. Candea's notion of "arbitrary location" tries to capture this precisely, whereby bounded sites become a "contingent window into complexity" that allows for a meaningful account of the fieldwork (Candea, 2007, p. 179). I subsequently started focusing on personhood as an anthropological concept, my field being bounded by aspects of experiences, meanings and practices that can be located in the person. I started exploring

aspects of sociality among Indian Muslims and the form of relations among them. The field was no longer a spectacle of fluidity that needs to be ethnographically celebrated, nor was personhood a carving of fixity to be unearthed from the psyche of Indian Muslims. Rather, fieldwork became an intensive moment of knowledge production characterized by discovery and critique.

Demarcating and Contemplating the Methods

In this exploratory task of personhood among Indian Muslims in Malaysia, fieldwork methods aim at a two-fold task of understanding and explaining – a "systematization of procedure" that could lead to "greater clarity or parsimony" in my attempt at explanation (Fernandez, 2014, p. 60). Participant observation becomes the primary method in engendering fresh understandings of this sort, one that is geared to capture aspects that are "tacit" (Zahle, 2016, p. 81). The phrase betrays a spectrum of possibilities and combinations (Bernard, 2011, p. 257), ranging from full participation to the purely observational. The iterative and dynamic nature of this method allows one to formulate new questions and answers during fieldwork (Johnson & Hruschka, 2015, p.99). One must make explicit the level of participation and observation of the field data that links the research question to field notes and ethnographic writing (Musante, 2015, p.251). This empirical take privileges sense-perception of practices as the most direct access to our interlocutors, particularly in ethnographic anthropology. An approach outlined by Zahle is to assess these practices based on social conceptions of propriety and effectiveness (Zahle, 2012). This becomes an analytical avenue to reach tacit and unarticulated dimensions that might not be accessed by direct discourse. It involves categorizing participant observations of particular events into assessors, observers and actions. This is followed up by detailing the multiple modes of approval/disapproval in interactions observed in the event. These may be verbal or non-verbal; and can be based on the actions of a person, group, the observer, or even that of an

assessor – in which case their actions themselves become a form of approval. It is down to a certain skill and disposition of the ethnographer to identify "reliable" assessors, which does not discount the possibility of themselves being one. The analysis can then be extended to studying how such practical knowledge is acquired by individuals, and in what forms these are accepted and transmitted by persons. The gist of this method is to provide an orderly procedure of arriving from field data to an analytical claim, while also providing a means of representing this implicit/embodied knowledge that leaves a critical space between description and interpretation.

Participant observation was heavily complemented with interviews, involving a combination of structured, semi-structured and unstructured forms. Participation in my case took a severe restriction with the Covid-19 lockdown from mid-March 2020 that forced me to radically rethink this method. While I had five months from October 2019 to February 2020 that provided me ample opportunities in social gatherings and performances, the lockdown shifted my focus towards multiple forms of interviewing that ultimately proved fruitful. With almost no exposure to face-to-face interactions for two months, the fact that my interlocutors were also confined provided time for me to gain in-depth interviews through audial, visual or written mediums. This is particularly telling for businessmen, who often do not have time to spare for long conversations. With the possibility of individual interactions from May 2020, person-centered ethnography took on a significant aspect that generated an important phenomenon for interpretation. This method is directed towards grounding behavior and practices in the lived experiences of our interlocutors through extensive and long-durational face-to-face dialogues (Hollan, 2001, p. 62). In these dialogues, a keen eye is kept on grasping the "emotional saliency and motivational force of beliefs, symbols and structures" (Levy, 2015, p. 313) to avoid misattributing them to our interlocutors. These unstructured forms of interviews are based on persons with whom a certain level of trust has been built, but through which method one tries

to extend or probe the boundaries of that trust. The aim is to transcend or attenuate "ordinary and conventional patterns of social discourse" (Levy, 2015, p. 314) in order to prompt latent or ambiguous dimensions of persons and thereby provide a window into how they are constituted. This granular approach tries to observe when and how a person responds emotionally and cognitively to topics and experiences. Interlocutors are not simply informants, but respondents whose responses within the interview setting are an object of study by themselves. The method also sheds light on *who* can be interviewed in such a manner, as well as the topics that can be breached. This allows us to examine issues of gender, age and taboo implicitly through the unsaid in these interviews. It also brings forth conventions of language, which in my case revealed manifold modes and levels of attachments. Being able to switch between multiple languages often provided them (and me) with different avenues to express and invoke concepts and emotions. At other times, being able to correspond in a particular language brought forth an element of bonding and trust that otherwise might not have arisen. In these senses, person-centered ethnography becomes a site for analysis by itself beyond discourses, narratives and biographies and one that helps point out the "interplay between social and personal forces" (Levy, 2015, p. 339).

The primary task in this method is that of listening, which may or may not be complemented by writing or a recording device. Taking notes at times created interruptions in the conversation that affected the responses as well as my questions, while at other times it conveyed a sense of seriousness and importance to the interlocutor. There is also a risk that once I stop taking notes during conversations, it conveys a sense to the interlocutor that the discussion has become irrelevant to me. Given my disposition that note-taking hindered my ability to listen, I often refrained from live field notes, unless relevant information cropped up that was quickly typed into my Ipad. Having permission to record the interview allowed me to focus more on the bodily gestures and signs of emotions, while not recording forced me to pay closer attention to

the words being said and possible silences in the interlocutor. Permission to record more often depended on a certain level of trust, and as such, I never took to it during the first meetings with anyone. There were occasionally a few persons who opened up immediately and become reflective, in which case the permission was politely inquired. But this depended on the setting as well, as a noisy restaurant might not be congenial for recording. The device could also provoke a sense of hesitation in the respondent, to which I had to ensure that the setting is relaxed. As such, my approach was to build a certain level of familiarity and friendship. If the person appeared to be knowledgeable and amiable to more reflective conversations of topics connected to personhood, a polite query would be posed at the end of the meeting if he/she would be willing to be recorded. Care would be taken to assure the interlocutor that these recordings are solely for me and no other ear. An interesting anecdote involved an initial meeting with a person of social standing in the city of Ipoh, with whom I had a wonderful conversation. I politely inquired at the end about the possibility to sit again another time, but with a recorder. The person registered a surprised face and inquired if I had not already recorded the conversation. After finding out that I had not, he went on to inform me that he gets calls and requests from students and researchers frequently, who would all record the conversations. The fact that I had not, and that I was now asking permission seemed to have impressed him and he insisted that I stay on for a while longer. This brought about much more acute reflections and vulnerability in his subsequent conversations that I might not have garnered otherwise.

Another aspect that I had initially undervalued was to impress the interlocutor – convey to them what I have already gathered which convey a sense of seriousness in my work. This is particularly pronounced when seeking the more subjective and obscure aspects of Indian Muslim experiences. Writing to my interlocutors my observations and reflections gradually gained importance in my field methods, particularly with the Covid lockdown. The initial

announcement of the lockdown in Malaysia in mid-March, including three weeks of total house confinement, came at a point in my fieldwork when I was encountering predictability and few surprises. As a means of engendering new responses and directions, I decided to compile the oral histories of the different Indian Muslim communities I had transcribed until then. The Covid restrictions also provided an opportunity whereby my interlocutors had time to spare to read and comment. All of them preferred to read in English, rather than Tamil, Malayalam or Malay (this aspect of language will be taken up in chapter seven). Primarily writing down the different histories of the various communities largely unknown to the other, I hoped to bring out in them the comparative reflection that I was attempting.

On Extending the Method to Ethnographic Writing

This task brought forth the risk of what Marcus calls "salvage" or "redemptive" modes of ethnography (Clifford, 1986, p. 165), whereby the ethnographer either tries to salvage a transforming cultural state or tries to redeem an "authentic" culture in the face of change. Depending on oral discursive history, particularly in ethnography, often assumes the subject's need to be represented. This becomes more acute when the writing does not attempt to betray the context of dialogue and transcription, rather giving the impression of one innocently inscribing oral discourses. The same extends to ethnographic writing, where writing becomes reduced to methods that seek "transparency in representation and immediacy of experience" (Clifford, 1986, p. 2). This immediacy often becomes predicated on a distant observance of cultural facts, the authority of narrative resting on the fact of being there. Yet, ethnography often is a result of contributions from our interlocutors, and in my case, particularly one that is dialogic and audial. Our writing of fieldwork needs to reflect "a hybrid of discovery and invention", the character of these discoveries arising from the "contributions of informants" (Lewis, 1997, p. 81). This points to what Strecker and Latosky conceive as the power of field

over one's ethnography, what they term the "pathos" of fieldwork, which is necessary for reflecting on the nature of field data (Strecker & Latosky, 2013, p. 4). In my case, participant observation gradually took on a form of participant-listening due to the Covid situation. Relations and trust built through this listening involved not just paying attention, but equally attempting to impress my interlocutors with questions that could potentially broaden our reflection. With the situation that the pandemic brought forth, writing to them about what I considered their disparate histories was one such way.

This write-up was done in the first two weeks of the lockdown in March 2020, a twenty-page documentation of oral history and a subsequent indication of what my research questions were. I initially sent it to seven men and two women from whom I had largely obtained these histories and experiences. As the Covid lockdown persisted with subsequent extensions, I sent it to a further five men and three women. While most of the responses to my write-up were positive and resulted in deeper conversations, two responses were negative but eye-opening. The two critiques, directed at separate aspects of my write-up, were from men with whom I had built a good level of trust until then. Mr Rafi was offended by how his community was represented in my write-up, which he claimed was a result of "listening to vile misinformation" from Indian Muslims of other communities. I sent him the write-up with an inquiry on a possible meeting after he manages to read it, hoping to get a response within a week. He called two hours later, having read it and vehemently stating that we will have to cut ties if I continue to maintain relations with certain other communities. Puzzled and distressed by the change in his tone, I tried to inquire about the aspects that I had got wrong in my writing and to convey to him that I was very much open and interested in getting his corrections. After a few minutes of futile imploring on my part, he hung up after stating that he has no interest in further conversations. What puzzled me was the fact that everything I had written about his community was based on what I had recorded from Mr Qasim from his own community. This elderly person, to whom I

had sent the write-up as well and with whom I would go on to have many meetings, had no critiques but was rather enthusiastic about meeting me. When trying to find possible instances in my writing that could have offended Mr Rafi, I could only find one phrase where I had mentioned that the initial migrants of his community were mostly illiterate. It was only later that I found out that this information was often used by others to look down on his community. Unlike Mr Qasim who was in his eighties and rather reserved, Mr Rafi was younger and more engaged with the broader society. This stigma was much more emotionally pronounced for him as someone encountering it from other Indian Muslims. This sore incident provided a better glimpse of the fault lines between the different communities, which were often brushed under the carpet when conversing with me.

The second negative response from Haji Abu was different in the sense that he was critical of how Indian Muslims represented themselves and thereby my implication in furthering those representations. Haji Abu is a person renowned in the intellectual circles of Muslims in Malaysia, although he keeps a certain distance from social gatherings of Indian Muslims. For many like him, it has been the ethnic labels that get attached to religion that has created ethnic tensions in Malaysia. While never one to hide his Indian roots, Haji Abu strives to evoke Islam as the prime identifier through which to bring together all Muslims while simultaneously conversing and engaging in dialogue with non-Muslims. Giving me a call after having read my write-up, he chided me for taking up this task but asked me to meet him. As a recognized figure in Malaysia, his reproach created a little trepidation in me when I went to meet him later. Yet surprisingly, he seemed to have reconsidered some of his stances after reflecting on what I had written. As someone whom I found to be frank but difficult to open up when conversing, this sensitivity was the perfect foil to get him to articulate his opinions and reflections on Indian Muslims. By the end, he complimented me for letting him know the contexts and experiences of other Indian Muslim communities that someone from his social position might not have

otherwise grasped. Even though he still disagreed with Indian Muslims asserting their ethnicity, he claimed to have had a better understanding of why they would do so. On later taking notes on this episode, I found that I had gained much more than what we had uttered in our conversation. His initial reproach and later sympathetic sleight provided a broader manifestation of ambivalences I encountered among my subjects.

Narrative Challenges and Questions of Genre

It is the nature of ethnographic data that the knowledge acquired is partial but excessive at the same time (Josephides, 1997, p. 31). This dyadic nature lends itself to the task of formulating or advancing theories, allowing one to move from the task of understanding our interlocutors to that of explaining their predicaments or our field experiences. In many ways, this becomes a task of translation involving unbridled polysemy. We try to seek concepts that are embedded in society and to interpret them to the discursive "culture of craftsmanship" that we as anthropologists participate in (Boyer, 2009, p. 3). While our fieldwork rests on an empathetic understanding of our subjects, the writing of ethnography flips it to the task of garnering empathy in our readers. Visweswaran provides two broad strategies of ethnographic writing that she terms "self-reflexive" and "deconstructive" (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 78). The first seeks to demonstrate to the reader an achievement of "hermeneutical unity" with the subjects through field experiences. The task thus becomes providing thick descriptions, as well as demonstrations of trust with the subjects that allowed the writer to understand them. While the writer can be critical of her own authority, she still believes in interpretation and assumes a "shared horizon" with the readers that provides grounds for it (Josephides, 1997, p. 17). The deconstructive strategy refuses to explain or represent but rather attempts to unpack concepts or theories that misinterpret or misrepresent their subjects. Yet Josephides points out that both ultimately attempt to garner empathy from the reader. The first attempts to achieve empathy at

a one-to-one level by assuming the shared horizon, while the latter seeks it at broader historical and political configurations. More crucially, the empathetic task extends as well to the mode through which it is typically represented (Josephides, 1997, p. 32) – the "monographic" medium through which we partake in this discourse.

The linguistic turn in anthropology proposed for a more experimental and creative mode of writing ethnographies to overcome such problems of representation (Clifford, 1986). Yet, in harking back to the notion of translation, Asad acutely points out that these experimental modes privilege the meanings of embedded concepts at the risk of sidelining their multiple practices and embodied aspects. More crucially, these cultural translations need not overcome "institutional inequalities" of languages and grammar, particularly in post-colonial societies (Asad, 1986b, p. 144). In another sense, Herzfeld and Fernandes make the case for the inadequacy of tropes that narrate the lives of our subjects in exhausting the "range of concepts and emotions" that can be expressed (Herzfeld & Fernandez, 2014, p. 76). It is in this context that I foreground emotions and senses in the next two chapters as a means of representing rhetorical or referential acts that are not restricted to words. Thus, communication beyond the verbal can be encoded in sentimental practices and mundane sensations, while metaphors can be hidden in bodily gestures. Chapter three questions the purported connotations of economic practices as non-emotional and "rational" by analyzing family businesses among Indian Muslims. Sentiments, taken here as second-order emotions, become a thread that provides a particular texture to personhood. The next chapter explores the inculcation of a shared sensorium as a form of cultural elaboration. Belonging to a community is disciplined through sensorial practices represented as being Islamic. In both of these chapters, the ethnographic illustrations are rooted in bodily experiences that provide a means of empathizing for the reader. The ensuing two chapters are more analytically inclined towards delineating social relations by focusing on space and time respectively. Chapter five examines the domestic

spaces of Indian Muslims as a site of intense political negotiations. Chapter six explores time through bureaucratic and ritual practices that stimulate imaginations of belonging.

Return to the Topic via Method

Ultimately, ethnography is less a matter of training in method or technique. Rather, it is more a mode of participating in a "culture of craftsmanship that anthropologists embrace" (Boyer, 2009, p. 3). This craft also provides a reflective window into the constitution of our theories and notions of humans that we purport to study. Delineating "habitus" or "discourses" in our analyses, for instance, might convey its working in our academic settings more than it being a reflection of our field. Conceptions of personhood are equally liable in this endeavour. Yet fieldwork, either on reflection or through particular moments, pushes us to rethink these preconceptions in subtle ways. I had alluded earlier to persistent insecurity throughout fieldwork of not having concrete methods at my disposal when tapping into the more obscure and subjective side of persons. A feeling of the incompleteness of the task persevered even if I was confident in the direction I was taking in my ethnography. Upon reflection though, this aspect becomes a thread to conceive of humans as one of becoming rather than being – the incompleteness had less to do with the methods than with the social constitution of humans themselves.

Fieldwork and ethnographic methods in this sense become more a reflexive and ethical engagement with our subjects than any given mode of conduct. I see these engagements of mine as a strategy for building narrative accounts of fieldwork around theoretical arguments of personhood in anthropology. It invokes the shared and accepted practices and notions of fieldwork and ethnography, even if critically. In line with Buroway's notion of the "extended case method", ethnography *extends* to the task of bringing theories to the "level of explicit

consciousness" (Burawoy, 2009, p. 23). Our positionality becomes the key to examining the contexts of our ethnographic observations. Although Burawoy juxtaposes context to power to redefine a more reflexive "science" for social studies (Burawoy, 2009, p. 61), one need not accept any satisfactory demarcation between them. My intention is rather to bring this critique to the questions generated by the tradition that we anthropologists partake in. The penultimate chapter attempts to grapple with such questions on personhood and tries to conceive of possible answers that my field data can provide.

Chapter III: Sentimental Textures of Family Businesses

Introduction

This chapter is an ethnography of Indian Muslim communities in Malaysia whose migration is linked to entrepreneurship. These communities claim their roots predominantly from the districts of Ramanathapuram and Tanjavur in the state of Tamil Nadu, as well from the Malabar province in the state of Kerala. Both these states are to the south of India, bordered by the Indian Ocean that links India and Malaysia. The monsoon winds that routinely breathe through these lands across the ocean have for centuries carried along with them traders, preachers, slaves and pilgrims. Indian Muslims have a long history as entrepreneurs on these routes and continue to carry out entrepreneurship. Yet this chapter is not primarily concerned with history[8]. The focus rests on an ethnography of their particular business practices that depend on an intimate connection between the spheres of business and family.

My interlocutors were keenly aware of the significance that their particular business practices have played in their social lives. They contrast these experiences to other Indian Muslim communities who do not have the same history of enterprising in Malaysia (dealt with in the next chapter). The contrast often extends to Malays, who constitute the vast majority of Muslims, and who have access to manifold opportunities for receiving state patronage and therefore do not have the same need to depend on family in business ventures. Despite this, a sense of ambivalence became evident in the statements of my interlocutors among these family businesses. Some see their traditions and practices as having allowed them to profitably sustain their businesses in Malaysia. For others, the opposite was emphasized: these businesses are a

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[8] Although the history of Indian Muslim trading in Malaysia is comparatively under-researched, there are few studies that deal with them either extensively or in passing. Of these (Nasution, 2014; Noor, 2013; Mohamad, 2004; Amrith, 2013) are worth mentioning. None of them go beyond the mid-20th century though; and, with the exception of Nasution, deal primarily with colonial archival sources. Aljunied provides a brief illustration of the contemporary Indian Muslim "cosmopolitanism" in Malaysia today (Aljunied, 2017, p. 13).

way to sustain their traditions and practices in the country. Among the young adults in the early years of their careers, this ambivalence was even more pronounced. Many grappled with the choice of whether to continue within their family businesses or seek a livelihood elsewhere, while others often contemplated a return to the business after having already left to pursue another occupation.

It is within this context that the chapter explores these business practices as a means of forming and instilling particular notions of personhood. Building on Yanagisako's work on family firms in Italy (Yanagisako, 2003), I illustrate how these family businesses depend on particular sentiments attached to the family to elicit motivation and production in the business. I build up a narrative of my ethnographic encounters by highlighting the sentiments that my interlocutors invoked or expressed towards business. I particularly focus on the "emotional tone" (Leavitt 1996: 518) of their discourses and practices, in order to trace the associations that they attach to business individually or collectively. Emotions are taken here as "unified experiences" that combine bodily feelings with cognition (Beatty, 2014, p. 559). They are thus "the very stuff of social relations" (Lutz, 2017, p. 183), or inseparable from it. According to this conception, persons are not simply the seat of emotion or the locus where emotion is experienced, but also its transmitters and transformers. Because the range and scope of human emotions are dauntingly vast, the analytical focus is therefore on sentiments – taken as second-order emotions that are articulated, anticipated and reflected upon in social interactions[9]. While this chapter is primarily aimed at illustration, in subsequent chapters I explore how they coalesce

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[9] Fajans strictly differentiates emotions, as a private subjective state, from sentiments – defining sentiments as culturally constructed patterns of feeling that emerge in human interactions involving conflicting interests and expectations. This is illustrated using the example of the sentiment of shame (Fajans 1983). Bens and Zenker do not distinguish sentiments and emotions as strictly, and locate sentiments at the juncture at which individual and collective meaning-making converge to (re)produce normative orders. Sentiments are thus taken as evaluative regimes that cut across emotional and affective states (Bens and Zenker 2019). In my conception of emotions as a combination of bodily feeling and thought, sentiments are those emotions that are collectively privileged – as a means of disciplining and inculcating appropriate emotions in each other. I combine Fajans's focus on the person with Bens' and Zenker's location of sentiments along a continuum of thought, feeling, and emotion.

into an "evaluative regime…that transport structures of meaning, govern formation of subjects and establish frames of communicative reference" (Bens & Zenker, 2019, p. 97).

The narrative of this chapter is circumscribed around elaborate descriptions of the economic dimensions of these family businesses. This deliberate boundedness, as explained in the previous chapter, is a methodological choice that allows me to better highlight partialities and fissures. Thus, while the narrative often gestures towards the domestic domain, this will be explored extensively in chapter five. As a male researcher investigating communities that have particular proprieties attached to gender interactions, my interactions with women were always mediated by persons close to them who were of my gender. The predominantly masculine interactions described in this chapter, therefore, reflect the highly gendered differentiation encountered during my fieldwork. Yet this differentiation is complicated when analysed as ideas and forms of personhood in subsequent chapters.

On Approaching Sentiments

The ethnography is based on participant observation and multiple forms of interviews outlined in the previous chapter. This venture into their lives and experiences was facilitated primarily by two means. The first was through the close friendship built with Indian Muslim youth from these communities during my earlier postgraduate education in Malaysia[10]. These existing ties formed the main route to make contacts within these communities. Another route was through certain prominent Indian Muslim individuals and community leaders, all men, who opened doors to these entrepreneurs and businessmen. Without references from these prominent

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[10] All of them were unmarried at that time and a frequent topic of our discussions was expectations at home regarding marriage in the near future. This was particularly pronounced among the women, who expressed more vulnerability regarding their futures. Of the men from these communities, most expressed anxiousness about the prospects of taking on the family business, or breaking out of the business cycle that many of their families were engaged in.

individuals and the trust they invoked, it would have been extremely difficult to get time with businessmen for sustained conversations. Initially, these businessmen rarely had time to spare. Meetings were often cancelled or postponed abruptly. It was usual to have the person show up extremely late, with apologies about being held up with business. Conversations with them would often be interrupted by calls, customers, and inquiries. Unlike with my friends, these interactions rarely became intimate. Rather, they were often curt responses about the business with few opinions or reflections about their lives.

This rather formal setting was less conducive for inquiries about family, women or intimacy. But there were possibilities for extended conversations on the business, like trade cycles, expansions of the business, and relations among Indian Muslims. Such conversations included fleeting episodes of emotions in which cognitive assessments became combined with feelings. I began collating them, as I found that bringing up questions on these topics was the best way to sustain a conversation – one that would allow me to probe into the scenes behind the business. Over time, I gradually discerned a pattern of business cycles linked to family and migration, and I explicated my findings in the form of a brief writeup confinement during the Covid lockdown in 2020. These were sent to a selected set of persons whom I had identified as key interlocutors – who read, corrected, and confirmed my analysis. This subsequently opened up further meetings with them and others that produced significantly more illuminating and deeper discussions, particularly on sentiments and cultural aspects of their communities. Yet much of these discussions depended on observations and encounters of their business routines and procedures, and it is here that the ethnography primarily attempts to locate sentiments. A methodological choice was to go beyond constructionist frames of language for accessing emotions (Lyon, 1995 p. 245). The ethnographic focus is thus less on emotional vocabularies and definitions and more on business practices.

As much of my access to these sentiments came through such dialogical encounters, the writing of the ethnography attempts to replicate the haphazard nature of these interactions. My access to their emotive dimensions is primarily through a belief in a gradual empathetic ability to grasp the emotional states of others. This can run the risk of assuming what one tries to prove (Lutz & White, 1986, p. 415), which can be mitigated by sustained dialogues on precisely these emotions and sentiments. Yet this can lead to another risk of attributing emotional categories that my interlocutors might not necessarily affirm. This problem only becomes acute though when the object of study is emotions themselves. It is not the intention here to arrive at definitions or classificatory schemes of emotions. Nor are analytical claims made on sentiments or emotions as an evaluative state of being. Rather, sentiments here are an illustrative means of expanding on the concept of personhood in subsequent chapters. This is not necessarily to subsume them completely into persons and relations. Rather, sentiments are developed into a form of "technique of the body" (Mauss, 1973) in chapter seven, whereby certain practices are sustained through emotional values attached to them. A question that arises is the possibility of adequately capturing these sentiments in ethnographic writing. Skoggard proposes an approach of demonstrating emotions by writing "evocatively" (Skoggard, 2015, p. 111), while Leavitt proposes a form of writing that plays on the emotions of the readers to convey and translate them (Leavitt, 1996, p. 518). Beatty calls for the employment of narrative techniques that provide deep descriptions of emotional episodes, where sentiments become forms of explaining, predicting and judging (Beatty, 2014, p. 558). All these approaches require what Lutz calls "linguistic dexterity (Lutz, 2017, p. 185), as well as extensive allocation of time in the field and space in the writing. Pragmatic considerations dictate that a balance has to be struck here with regard to representing the particular type of accumulated ethnographic data.

In this chapter, therefore, sentiments are represented through narratives of how my interlocutors relate the present to their pasts and futures. In what ways are the pasts evoked?

Why is the present inhabited in particular ways? How are futures encountered? The emotional repertoires that my interlocutors drew upon to express and reflect on such questions are the colours chosen to paint on the canvass of the person. Sentiments thereby emerged as socially shaped idioms and strategies for defining and negotiating personhood during my fieldwork, as well as a form of defending preferences of the collective. The chapter follows a temporal order: It begins with stories told of their businesses in the past, moving on to stories enacted in the present, and subsequently stories about the future. The final part then examines the ambivalences highlighted earlier. To some, breaking out of these traditions and practices involves a sense of independence – particularly with opting out of arranged marriage. For others, the choice of returning to family business from corporate/professional life also hinged on being independent with regard to family and sustenance.

Pretexts and Contexts: Chronicles of the Past

This section attempts to create a template out of the manifold historical narratives recounted to me by Indian Muslims about their enterprising in Malaysia. Most of these narratives would generally begin with a man migrating to Malaysia from a city, town, or village in India in the early or mid-twentieth century. He would typically be described as unmarried – in his late teens or twenties. Unless he had a father or an uncle in the country, for each of the places of origin in India there were designated places in Malaysia where single migrants stayed until they gained some sort of employment[11]. During this initial liminal state, he would navigate the new environment, using his native networks to seek a livelihood for himself and his family back in India. My interlocutors frequently mentioned the importance of a form of trust based on where

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[11] For example, the Malayan Mansion in Kuala Lumpur housed people coming mostly from Tanjavur and Ramanathapuram in the mid-twentieth century, and the Malabar Masjid in Segambut housed those coming from Kerala. Similar residences existed in Penang but were mostly limited to people from one specific local village network: they often took the form of housing for employees located above the premises of business.

a person "comes from" ("*ur*" in Tamil, "*naadu*" in Malayalam), by virtue of which he would seek out opportunities among existing Indian Muslim enterprises. If an immediate member of his family ran a business, he would often receive employment there. His trustworthiness would gradually increase as he satisfactorily carried out his job, or if he exhibited entrepreneurial skills. At this juncture, he would typically be presented with two opportunities from his employer – an opportunity to expand the business, and/or a proposal to marry a woman from among the employer's kin that would strengthen this trust. Promising individuals, or those from prominent families, might already have a proposal arranged before their initial migration that would add to their trustworthiness. Once the migrant branched out and/or married in, he was in a better position to exert his skills and thereby gradually seek his own independence as an entrepreneur.

Until the 1980s, the women mostly remained in India. While the men migrated to a new country and negotiated a place for themselves there, for women, migrating meant moving from their birth household to the family household of the husband in their hometown[12]. The men would visit the family back in India once or twice a year, where they would spend a month or two after appointing someone trustworthy to look after the business in their absence. Concurrently, some expressed a sense of regret that such practices of migrating at an early age for enterprising resulted in the men never receiving more than a certain basic level of education. Only rarely did I come across men who pursued education beyond high school prior to the 1990s, although their involvement in business at a young age was seen as having provided opportunities to be fluent in multiple languages[13]. Improved economic opportunities and modes of transportation from the 1980s were claimed to have led to a gradual migration of the immediate families into Malaysia. This became more pronounced around the turn of the 21st century. Anecdotes about

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[12] See an interesting collection of oral histories of these women in India by Fansura Banu (Banu, 2020)

[13] Beyond their mother-tongues of Tamil or Malayalam, it is typical to be fluent in Malay and English. Fluency in Mandarin is not uncommon as well, owing to the significant Chinese presence in Malaysian economy.

the social lives of these migrant families revolved around tightly knit clusters based on shared hometowns, which is to an extent prevalent even today[14]. These anecdotes also revealed how marriage was usually arranged within or between these clusters. Such transactions were often demarcated by the businessmen to be the domain of women, with their particular elaborate networks of interactions and negotiations.

A marriage proposal for a person in their community could be with someone who was in Malaysia or back in India. Many interlocutors suggested that, in the past, marrying back in India was preferred for children who had grown up in Malaysia. The intention of this was, to borrow Mr Haja's words, to maintain their "roots" in India for the new family – which also meant keeping their "culture alive at home" in Malaysia. A crucial factor is the fact that marital ties provided a source of new potential employees: in this way, the new relations in India could become trustworthy in business – with the networks of trust even sometimes extending to an entire town or village. The negotiations of these arranged marriages usually included a business "investment" by the families for the new couple. Almost all businessmen and women would reveal, some upon reflection, that this practice ensured a mode of livelihood for the next generation while keeping the wealth and trust within the families. Some admitted that these often became a disguised form of dowry when the bridal family had to contribute more. Many insisted, however, that this form of marriage did not just bring two individuals into a union, but also two families/businesses. I began to see it as a surprisingly effective mode of business expansion, particularly regarding finance and security.

My narrative until now has been person-centric. In order to get a more institutional understanding of their businesses, I now look at the particular sectors that Indian Muslims

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14 This is reflected in the existence of hometown associations of Indian Muslims in Malaysia. During fieldwork, I took part in social gatherings of two of the largest associations – namely the village associations of Panaikulam and Alakangulam in Tamil Nadu – at which the attendance numbered in the thousands.

primarily engage in today – restaurants, currency exchanges (called moneychangers in Malaysia), provisions stores (local term for groceries) and jewellers[15]. The descriptions are based on information from the sort of formal conversations mentioned earlier that had little sentimental elaboration. Yet, in subsequent conversations with the businessmen, I came to realize the value attached to the invocation of these memories in subsequent conversations. These memories enabled me to grasp the emotional dimensions of their experiences of the present, as well as the hopes and concerns attached to their future in the country.

Restaurants

The history of Indian Muslim *Mamak* restaurants in Malaysia today is popularly associated with the term *Nasi Kandar* (literally "rice on a stick" in Malay but generally meaning food carried on a pole). The origin of this term is always traced to Penang in the early twentieth century, where Indian Muslim men from Ramanathapuram in Tamil Nadu walked around the town selling home-made food carried on a pole. They initially sold rice, and occasionally noodles, with Indian spices and curries. Since only the men migrated to Malaya, they employed women from another Indian Muslim community in Penang to grind the Indian spices for the curry. The curry would be cooked overnight and then reheated the next day until it became a thick sauce, which would be poured over the rice or noodles. A few of these men married Malay women who would cook for them with their own culinary fusions. The menu was initially restricted to types of food that could be carried around. This expanded once the sellers began setting up corner stalls inside the Chinese restaurants that were widespread throughout Penang

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[15] Historical and archival sources suggest that Indian Muslims were also engaged in bookstores, printing and publishing during the mid-twentieth century (Fakhri 2002); but I did not encounter a prevalence of this type of business among Indian Muslims.

at that time[16]. It was from this that *Nasi Kandar* subsequently developed into what today is a popular street food in urban Malaysia.

When I presented this account in my write-up to my interlocutors, many pointed out that despite this story about the origin of the *Nasi Kandar*, there were already established Indian Muslim restaurants in urban Malaya prior to and during this time. These restaurants served "authentic" Indian food with very little of the fusions that characterize the *Nasi Kandar*. These were run by comparatively wealthier migrants, particularly from the district of Tanjavur in Tamil Nadu[17] or Malabar in Kerala[18]. Most were based in the then newly emerging city of Kuala Lumpur, but there were even a few in Penang[19] and Johor[20]. These businesses had to confront successive social and political instabilities until the 1980s[21], by which time many of the owners opted to close their restaurants and return to India. Of the few families who stayed in Malaysia, most of them no longer own businesses, but have moved on to other employments or professions. It was around this time –in the 1980s– that the smaller *Nasi Kandar* run by men from Ramanathapuram gradually began expanding, particularly by tapping into cheap labour within and beyond their families back in their hometowns in India. This also coincided with the development of public urban housing projects that targeted the Malay working class. Their requirements for *halal* food were catered to by these Indian Muslim restaurants, who offered

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[16] Some claim that this shift occurred when the British administration took measures against these *Nasi Kandar* due to hygiene concerns, and so they started to set up shop in these Chinese bistros, catering to customers who required halal food. My interlocutors note that the incorporation of sauces like kicap (sweet soya sauce) into the food also took place at this stage.

[17] Restoran Kassim (Jalan Tunku Abdurrahman), Restoran Bilal (Jalan Ipoh), Hamidiya restoran (Batu Road) and Restoran Mohyudin were mentioned to me as examples in Kuala Lumpur.

[18] Those mentioned to me were Kuttybappu Kader (Jalan Ipoh), Kunnippa at Bangsar, Zamzam Restaurant (Masjid India), Bukhari restaurant (Masjid India) and Malabar restaurant (Klang).

[19] Restoran Hamidiyya is a prime example that is still well established and renowned in Lebuh Cambell, Penang. Others include Dawood Restoran (Queen Street), Sultaniya, Craven A (first 24-hour restaurant in Penang), Ramzan and Tajudin Husain.

[20] These were predominantly those from Kerala like Restoran Yassin (Johor Bahru), Restoran Hamza (Keluang), and Restoran Mommali (Tiram).

[21] These include the second World War and the Japanese invasion of Malaya, Independence from British in 1957, the racial riots in 1965 and 1969 and subsequent separation of Singapore; and the declaration of Emergency by the government of India from 1975-77 that restricted movements between the countries.

cuisines that were appetizing and affordable – gradually earning the epithet popular today of *Mamak* (Tamil for uncle).

As my interlocutor Haji Shabeer pointed out, the employees were initially brought over under temporary visit visas, but they would typically overstay its duration until they made enough to go back home. Agents – typically relatives of the restaurant owners in Malaysia – began cropping up in the towns and villages of Ramanathapuram, promising the men work in these restaurants. Commissions and/or deposits would be charged for this, with the money often used to expand or set up new ventures in Malaysia. In the mid-1990s there was a nation-wide raid of these restaurants that resulted in the mass deportation to India of those overstaying their visas. Visa permits for restaurant workers became stringent and significantly bureaucratized as a result[22]. Yet the demand and profitability of these restaurants only kept increasing with the turn of the twenty-first century. Today, families from Ramanathapuram still dominate the sector, but they are no longer the only ones involved in it: I observed an increasing consolidation of the market by Malabari businessmen from the district of Kasargod. These men still have most of their families and wealth in India, and tap into the unemployed youths back in their hometowns and villages. The fact that most of these Malabari families do not see their future in Malaysia implies a particular tendency to save for their eventual return to India. Yet, after a few years, these accumulated savings provide them an impetus to further invest and expand in Malaysia when business seems lucrative.

Moneychangers

Haji Shabeer, who runs two moneychanging shops in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur, traces the beginnings of the currency exchanges to the same period that the *Nasi Kandar* men were selling

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[22] These and similar instances gave rise to Persatuan Pengusaha Restoran Muslim Malaysia (PRESMA), a prominent Indian Muslim association established in order to represent the needs and grievances of Indian Muslim restaurants (their webpage is available at https://www.presma.com.my/info/ – last accessed 17 August 2022).

food at the Penang ports. The moneychangers also began on the streets; dressed well and holding a ringer bell, they called out their services to people requiring their currencies exchanged. This route was chosen by those who had self-confidence in negotiating with strangers in multiple languages. But it was also chosen by those who were too lazy to carry food around, Haji told me with a wink. As with the *Nasi Kandar*, these businesses rarely had their own premises in the beginning. A crucial turning point was the Vietnam War, as US soldiers would arrive at Penang when on leave with plenty of dollars to spend. The Indian Muslim moneychangers saw a sudden rise in their profits which eventually allowed them to rent space at the port or in the city of Penang. Since then, they have expanded throughout urban Malaysia, just like the restaurants. Mr Majid was quick to point out that this business plays on thin margins of profit and requires only a few employees, who must, however, be highly trustworthy persons. Unlike with restaurants, there are not as many opportunities for hiring extended family members, but there is rather a tendency to confine the business to the immediate family. The expansion of business occurs slowly, through the accumulation of currency stocks and maintaining close networks with others in the field, in order to deal with sudden spikes in supply or demand. Consequently, the moneychangers whom I met all belonged to families from Ramanathapuram.

Provisions Stores

Provisions stores run by Indian Muslims can be traced back to plantation estates, mining sites, and housing colonies. Malabaris were particularly noted for running these provisions stores among Indian plantation workers or labourers' accommodations throughout Malaya in the early and mid-twentieth century. They often also acted as pawn-brokers, creditors, and money-remitters. I was informed of a significant presence of Indian Muslim provisions stores in Ipoh

and Taiping, which catered to a booming mining industry until the 1970s[23]. Apart from these, provisions stores were also present in areas with a significant Indian Muslim presence like Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, and Johor. Yet until the turn of the 21st century, these entrepreneurs rarely brought their families to Malaysia. Following the "race riots" of 1969 and the gradual closure of rubber plantations and estates, many eventually moved back to India. Some were forced to remain in Malaysia owing to an uncertainty of going back[24], while I also encountered a few who had married local women and permanently settled in Malaysia.

Similar to the expansion of restaurants laid out earlier, many enterprising Indian Muslims decided to set up provisions stores in newly developed urban housing estates from the 1980s onwards. With the help of references from other established Indian Muslim entrepreneurs in Penang and Kuala Lumpur, they were able to obtain supplies on credit from mostly Chinese-run wholesale suppliers and open modest ventures[25]. Mr Haneef informed that after a few years they would typically expand, opening a second store managed by their sons or brothers. In other cases, he notes, these entrepreneurs expanded instead into other sectors, like restaurants and moneychangers, because many felt these sectors offered a larger volume of business or profit margins.

Jewellery Stores and Other Vendors

The Kapitan Keling Mosque in the heart of Penang is perhaps the biggest Indian Muslim symbol of the city. When coming out of the mosque, one's gaze is met by a whole row of Indian Muslim jewellery stores[26]. I was informed by Mr Kameel, who had once run a store, that certain entrepreneurs managed to get these lucrative spots at a comparatively low rent due to

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[23] Prominent examples of such enterprises in Ipoh were Habeebullah Flour Mills, Abdul Wahab & Co (AKM), and Shaik Mohamad & Muradu Khan Co. (AJA) – all three were run by families from Alakangulam of Ramanathapuram district in Tamil Nadu.
[24] This was also due to the declaration of emergency in India during 1975–1977.
[25] My interlocutors mentioned a racial dynamic that is relevant here: most Chinese suppliers rarely or never provided credits to Malays.
[26] Pitts Street and Chulia Street in Penang are the site of many of these jewellery stores today.

these lands being part of the mosque endowments (*Wakaf*). Almost all of the owners were from the town of Panaikulam in Ramanathapuram, with adjacent shops often run by relatives. When they obtained these spots around 40 years ago, some tried their luck with jewellery, others as moneychangers. Initially, they relied on contacts with certain Malay wholesalers from the state of Kelantan, along with a few Chinese dealers. Initial short credits would gradually grow in volume as the trust in the business picked up. While some eventually closed their business, most became successful and were able to expand into other areas of Penang, as well as in Kuala Lumpur[27]. This sector is not as widespread as the others discussed above, particularly due to the high investment that is required to begin one today. Apart from the jewellery stores, there were many individual Indian Muslim entrepreneurs who operated as bread sellers, hawkers, and other small-scale vendors, often on a motorbike or pulley. These entrepreneurs often came from villages or towns in India that had few support networks in Malaysia at that time, and thus had to start with low investments and then seek to gradually rise up. While this sort of business existed in those communities considered in the next chapter, it was particularly with those who came from the communities explored here that there was a conscious effort to sustain entrepreneurship with the next generation[28].

Trust: A Mode of Practice in the Present

Throughout my fieldwork, trust and trustworthiness were constantly invoked as central to their particular business practices[29]. Yet most of them were wary of divulging the details and

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[27] There are two enterprises in Kuala Lumpur that claim to have a longer history in the country – Abdul Razak Jewellers and K.M. Oli Mohamed Royal Jewellers.

[28] There is an exception among an extended family in the Tenkasi community in Penang, locally renowned for catering services. This family and the community will be referred to in the next chapter.

[29] This is in contrast to other sentiments which were more often indicated through specific practices or actions. While I do not primarily focus on the "vocabularies of emotion" (Geertz, 1959, p.225) accessed through language categories in a cultural context, almost all of my interlocutors used the English term trust or trustworthy even if our conversations were in Tamil or Malayalam.

intricacies of these business practices. Perhaps suspicions arose in them that, being an Indian myself, I was a potential businessman out to acquire privy information. I thus had to establish a certain level of trust, which was predominantly through receiving references from others. One illuminating breakthrough was made possible through my friendship with Shaduli, a colleague of mine at my earlier university. He arranged for me to meet with his father and brothers, who were all invested in the running of five restaurants they manage as a family. The father had migrated from Ramanathapuram four decades ago, initially selling bread on a motorbike. An investment in a modest restaurant in the suburbs after seven years gradually expanded into five branches today. The father was quick to express his humility, claiming that this was typical of those in his generation who had migrated to Malaysia. In the midst of a long conversation, I inquired about what made a business successful. After a momentary reflection, he replied in Tamil that it depended on "good employees, good location, and good family". Later, when going through my fieldnotes, this in many ways summed up what other men had conveyed disconnectedly. In the following section, I will therefore try to illustrate how trust as a sentiment operates through these three elements.

Routinization of Trust

The first exposure for most people to Indian Muslims in Malaysia is through *Mamak* restaurants – a striking cosmopolitan space[30]. At the counter one finds an Indian Muslim, behind him items that symbolically demonstrate his Islamic faith in a country that often equates his ethnicity with Hinduism. He communicates with his workers in Tamil, with customers typically in Malay, and with suppliers or salesmen it is not uncommon to hear Mandarin or Hokkien. The food follows this diversity – one can choose from and combine a variety of Indian, Pakistani, Malay, Thai, and Chinese items: For example, noodles cooked in Indian spices, Indian flat bread served

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[30] I attempted to participate as an employee in a prominent restaurant in Kuala Lumpur for a week, but this was curtailed by the Covid lockdown. Subsequent easing of the lockdown came with a lot of restrictions on the employees that can be present at a restaurant. As such, that attempt was given up.

with Malay or Thai soup, hot milk tea topped with ice. These restaurants are common points for quick meetings or casual discussions and often served as a place where I would meet my interlocutors as well[31].

Shaduli's father and brothers explained to me that a chain of restaurants is typically managed with a centralized kitchen at the head branch. The different curries and *Biryani* (spiced rice) are cooked here; leaving the basic rice, noodles, and breads to be made fresh at each branch. This allows for a standard flavour across the chain, handled by the head cook at the main branch. In their restaurant chain, different tasks were delegated among the siblings, with one brother in charge of logistics and the procurement of supplies for all the branches. Another brother dealt with the finances and accounting, the most crucial being collection of revenues from all the branches at the end of the day. The father, as the most experienced businessman, was based at the busiest branch, with his nephew employed to handle the administrative and bureaucratic affairs behind the business. The chefs and workers were all usually from their district of Ramanathapuram in India, but none were related to them. Family members, I was told, are rarely involved in the more labour-intensive work of cooking, serving, and cleaning in Indian Muslim restaurants. These employees are usually procured via agencies that operate among their local networks, while sometimes a person may be recommended by a current employee.

Ali is another restaurant owner who I had a very good rapport with. His grandfather ran a successful restaurant until the mid-twentieth century, when his father took over the business. Now, in the hands of Ali, it has become a chain of restaurants. Since his family is based in India, he travels frequently back and forth between India and Malaysia, which made it difficult for me to meet him. But when we did manage to meet, his insights and clarifications were very

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[31] Duruz provides a portrayal of restaurants as cosmopolitan spaces in Malaysia (Duruz, 2014, p. 68).

significant. Each of the branches he owns is managed by a close relative – either a brother, an in-law, or a cousin. A typical day for Ali involves a routine visit to each branch, sorting out legal or bureaucratic issues, as well as overseeing occasional repairs and maintenance. He visits his wife and three kids in India every two months and spends around two weeks there. During this time, he gets inquiries for employment opportunities from men seeking to come to Malaysia. If the person is well recommended, he would be taken on as an employee in an open position in one of these branches. As the employee accrues or earns trust, he is typically put in charge of either the cash register or procurement. He may continue to gain trust and responsibility to the point that he is eventually entrusted with managing a particular branch.

One of Ali's main concerns is conflicts that arise with, or between, employees. These conflicts can potentially sour relations back in India as well. Ali also told me of many instances where businesses have gone broke because the owners trusted employees who subsequently went on to swindle them, particularly at the cash register. While almost all restaurants today have surveillance technologies that mitigate this to a certain extent, for Ali these bring with them new possibilities for malpractice that they have to be alert to. He also was keen to point out how restaurants relied on bribery to acquire labour permits and licenses. Typically, a restaurant would be granted two or three labour permits per application. The level of connections that a restaurant owner has with "agents", who can arrange for more permits via contacts they have in the bureaucracy, dictate how many he can actually employ.

The dynamics of moneychangers and provisions stores were slightly different, as they rarely involved labour-intensive tasks as with the restaurants. With the moneychangers I observed, there would typically be one or two persons at the counter dealing with individual customers. But the main activity occurs behind the scenes with travel agencies, corporations, or small enterprises requiring currencies on short notice. Extremely crucial to this business is the counting/sorting of the currencies and transporting it through "runners". Both of these tasks

can only be delegated to those who are extremely trustworthy[32]. I once managed to get an appointment with Siraj, who agreed to meet at his moneychanger office after lunch. Upon arriving there and inquiring at the counter for him, I was told to wait. After twenty minutes, I messaged Siraj informing him that I had arrived. He replied that he is in the back office, but is a bit busy and will meet me in a while. After an hour of waiting, the person at the counter – his nephew – approached me, having mistaken me for a businessman. When I informed him of my reason for being there, he went in and came back with an apology from Siraj, who relayed that he might be caught up for another hour. His nephew then went on to have a conversation with me and informed me that Siraj was counting currency stocks for a big request that had come up. In the meanwhile, customers would occasionally come in, inquire about exchange rates, and make currency orders. The nephew said that the customers who come to the premises constitute only a quarter of the business, with the majority of the revenue coming from corporate entities or travel agencies who require foreign currencies in bulk. To fulfill these orders, mid-tier moneychangers like them depend on borrowing from other Indian Muslim moneychangers, which requires maintaining amicable relations with them. The borrowed currency was manually collected, counted, and sorted by Siraj, which was why our meeting ultimately ended up being delayed for three hours.

The employment structure at provisions stores and jewellers is similar to that of the moneychangers. Most employees would be family members, as this assures a certain level of trust. Restaurants are the only type of business in my study where a considerable number of people outside the family have to be employed. For many of these entrepreneurs, informal relations with employees outside the family are fairly minimal. However, some develop closer personal relations with these employees, particularly with individuals who have been employed

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[32] My interlocutors frequently mentioned the risks of being robbed that runners are exposed to, given that they carry around cash frequently. As such, trustworthiness also has an element of being of able to protect themselves.

for a long time. Shazia, whose father got his start in Malaysia in the restaurant business, related memories of her childhood in which the seven employees and her family occasionally went on excursions together for bonding. As the business expanded and more employees came in, her father could no longer afford to take the time for such outings. Nevertheless, the family still maintains closer ties with this initial cohort of employees.

Spatial Dimensions of Trust

There was, and still is, a tendency for those from a particular locality in India to cluster in particular cities. Thus, those from Panaikulam were found to be predominantly in Penang, those from Irumeni were highly concentrated in Ipoh, those from Alagankulam in Kuala Lumpur, and those from Vani and Kasargod in Johor[33]. There is admittedly a pull towards Kuala Lumpur among the youth today. But many outside the city are often reluctant to expand their business there, frequently complaining to me about exorbitant rents and lack of kin networks. Entrepreneurs preferred expanding within the city that they have "trust" in, and consider it risky to expand outside of it. The spatiality was also dictated by the business dynamics described above. For restaurants, the current standard practice of having centralized kitchens means that it would be extremely difficult to transport the food daily to a branch that is outside a city. It is also difficult to manage the business on a day-to-day basis when there are few kin to rotate or take over. Similar dynamics are at play with moneychangers, where constant borrowing from and lending to moneychangers play a crucial part of their business. Thus, it would be difficult to succeed in another city without having a developed network of moneychangers there. Another factor is the availability of lucrative spots in a city. Shaduli's father mentioned locations adjacent to bureaucratic offices, housing projects or parking spaces as prime spots for restaurants today. As competition for such spaces has increased, obtaining

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[33] This was also reflected in the native association gatherings typically were hosted annually or bi-annually.

them mostly depends on having influential contacts or agents in the city, which those outside its networks might find difficult to access. The spatiality is also heavily linked to the domestic domain, and this will be examined in detail in chapter five.

Family as Trust

In the previous two sections, the sentiment of trust emerges as an epiphenomenon of human interactions that takes the form of emotive assessment of persons and places. Beyond this, trust also becomes embodied in particular ways that induce certain practices and conduct with regard to family. One question I raised to restaurant owners provided a particularly revealing answer – Why is it that a sector that caters predominantly to *halal* requirements of an urban Malay population have a disproportionately high number of Indian Muslim restaurants, and comparatively fewer Malay ones? I had thought this was a complicated question, and expected answers that might refer to their particular cuisine, or perhaps advantages they had because of being able to draw on cheap labour from India. Instead, nearly all of them responded with the same racialized joke. To paraphrase – "An Indian Muslim saves all his profits for opening a second branch, a Malay saves all his profits for a second wife"[34]. Despite the obvious humorous exaggeration implied in these responses, the frequency with which it was invoked deserves unpacking. The particular connotation attached to savings implied here will be explored in the next section; while the value Indian Muslims attach to a strict monogamous conception of marriage, frequently claimed to be contrary to Malay Muslim sensibilities, will be addressed in chapter five. I will focus here on invocations of trust in the family with regard to their business.

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[34] Razif has looked at the practice of polygamy in Malaysia (Razif, 2017; Razif, 2020). This practice is often referred to by Indian Muslims as a marker of how they differ from Malays, which will be explored further in chapter five. Interestingly, Malay men often refer to marrying a second wife as "opening a second branch" (*buka cawangan baru*). I thank Nurul Huda Razif for this information.

Coming back to the conversation with Shaduli's father, I probed further about what he meant by the "good family" that he claimed was necessary for a successful business. He described the need for committed family members who are willing to sacrifice for the business. There might arise situations when someone will have to take the night shift at the restaurant, or travel to another city to solve a legal or bureaucratic issue of the business or its employees. Being able to do so depended on a supporting and understanding wife and family. A good family also meant good standing among other Indian Muslims – through which it becomes easier to find marital alliances suitable for the business, raise finances within the community, procure trustworthy labour from India, or even settle bureaucratic issues via influential intermediaries. These marital alliances were key for those families who wanted the next generation to be invested in the business. I once set out to meet Mr Haja, a man from a prominent restaurant family, who, as I had been told, was going through a bitter dispute with another Indian Muslim restaurant owner. I was therefore careful to avoid the other man's name in our conversation. Yet when our conversation shifted to the topic of arranged marriages, he casually mentioned that his family was negotiating for their daughter to marry the latter's son! Both the families were convinced that it was a good match, but were waiting for their son and daughter to agree to it.

The deep entanglements of business and family can also lead to cases where conflicts in one domain spill into another. Although I did not encounter such cases myself, I did encounter cases where trust become an impediment to the business. Faris's marriage, which was arranged by his family, involved both families investing in a new business venture for the couple. He told me that this restaurant business was not doing well, with losses eating into their pockets due to what he saw as mismanagement on the part of the families. The restaurant was still packed, though, with our conversation being frequently interrupted by employees and customers. When asked if it was an issue of trust, he replied that there was no "mistrust" as

such between those involved. It would have been easier to resolve the issue if that was so, he claimed. Rather, the families seem to lack confidence in the future of the economy, hindering his desire to improve or expand. Yet, closing the business is an extremely difficult decision that cannot be taken in haste. Many of those employed under their business license were family members from India; in addition, the investment was shared by both families. Therefore, a decision to close the business involved considerable stakes and could even lead to the breakdown of the marriage. Thus, in this case trust led the owners and the employees to push on with the business for each other. Before I could dig deeper into this aspect of trust, Faris was called into the kitchen. After he came back carrying food for us, our conversation drifted into other topics. Faris no longer wanted to talk about family or the business.

In other instances, trust does not develop as a result of a person's character. Mannan often complained that his father never managed to be a successful entrepreneur because he "talked too much". Mannan's father had migrated to Malaysia in the 1980s, following in the footsteps of others in his family. He began as a cashier at his cousin's restaurant in Kuala Lumpur, but never stayed at one enterprise for more than two years. As someone who was considered as prone to gossip, families were wary of divulging business and family matters to him. As such, he was never able to stay at one place and gain trust, but kept moving from one place of employment to another. He always managed to get work among his kin, but never succeeded in rising up in the business.

What is interesting here is not merely how trust is defined, but in particular, following Jiménez, what it does in social interactions (Jiménez, 2011, p.179). Being from the same native town can often create a sense of trust between two Indian Muslims, even if they have never met before. Trust can also carry over from one sphere of life to another: trust accrued in business often made a person suitable to enter the family through marriage. Trust can also thus be elevated to a degree that it becomes extremely difficult to break out of. In this sense, trust opens

up a space for working in the present more than in the future (Broch-Due & Ystanes 2016). The comforts of restricting certain interactions or activities like business to those within this space of trust can appear provincial to those outside it. I frequently heard complaints from others about how these communities keep to themselves in their business activities. But to those within these spaces, the sentiment of trust is a mode of practice in the present that brings with it certain expectations and proprieties.

Hopes and Forebodings: Sentiments regarding the Future

The previous sections looked at the sentiments attached to the past, followed by how the sentiment of trust played out in the present among Indian Muslim businesses. This section moves on to their narratives about the future with regard to the business, particularly through the practice of savings.

Remittances as Homage

Mr Nisham is a well-respected individual who was brought up in Malaysia but claims his roots from the district of Tanjavur in Tamil Nadu. He recounted that his community had dominated the Indian Muslim business scene until the 1980s, although most of those still in Malaysia today have moved on from entrepreneurship to a life in the corporate or professional world. He emphasized that this earlier generation of entrepreneurs rarely brought their families over. Rather, they sent a considerable part of their revenues and savings back home in India, which were invested in assets like land or gold. After the independence of Malaysia from the British in 1957, most of these entrepreneurs lost confidence in the country's future. Many stopped investing further in Malaysia, he told me, and their remittances to India increased in volume. Following the infamous "Race Riots" in Kuala Lumpur in May 1969, many of these

entrepreneurs shut their shops and returned to India for good. Similar narratives were provided to me by Malabari entrepreneurs in Kuala Lumpur, and traders from Alagankulam in Ipoh.

This period coincided with the growth of *Nasi Kandar* and other businesses from Ramanathapuram in Penang mentioned earlier. Yet even those who stayed in Malaysia placed importance on savings that were to be remitted back to the family in India. Even after the 1990s, when the immediate family of married men began migrating to Malaysia rather than remaining in India, the pattern of remitting savings back to India persisted. Families at that time ultimately saw their future as being back in India, and a good part of their savings were reserved for an annual or bi-annual ritual visit to their native town or village. This was also indicated as a means to acculture the children to the local community and extended family in India.

Accumulating for the Business/Family

By 2010's, these family trips to India had become less common. Rather, families were more inclined to bring their parents or relatives in India over to Malaysia. Mr Rafi tells me that this was because entrepreneurs could no longer afford to take breaks as their businesses began expanding rapidly. Concurrently, they began to invest much of their savings back into the business to enable these expansions. In the case of restaurants, the predominant business today, Ali told me that an average restaurant requires an initial capital that could be recuperated in two or three years. By the third or fourth year, a successful business should be in a financial position to expand to a second branch. According to Haji Shabeer, at first Indian Muslims generally rented their business premises, but they gradually found out that owners would keep increasing the rent once the business began to flourish. Buying property instead of renting goes along with a shift in attitude. When they see themselves in the country for the foreseeable future, they become comfortable in buying premises. This confidence becomes more pronounced when the family settles in the country or opts for citizenship. During my fieldwork, buying premises had become the norm, and I was generally informed that saving for the future

expansion of the business had become an inculcated sentiment. This reflected in the fact that, as Haji Shabeer told me, they typically compete with each other to gain lucrative spots even before the facilities have been built, waiting in line at bureaucratic offices to reserve space in future condominiums or buildings.

Because the business expansion was also tied to the practice of arranged marriages, there is a strong sentiment in favour of allocating savings for the marriage of the children. It was previously a common practice, Mr Iqbal tells me, to declare the contributions of both families for the new couple during the wedding ceremony[35]. Today, he says, this information is no longer publicized, but the practice of contributing resources for the new couple continues. Typically, the contributions take the form of gold, but may also include a prime business location, car, or even a house. Some of my conversation partners indicate that the largest contribution comes from the bride's family – effectively becoming a form of dowry. According to Mr Iqbal, this can give the bride's family a sense of security. It can provide avenues for independence and livelihood for the new family, while simultaneously making it difficult for the groom to break out of the marriage[36].

'Islamized' Sentiments

Some sentiments that were explicitly articulated as being motivated by Islamic beliefs and practices among my interlocutors. The most common of these was a general suspicion of modern banks, owing to the Islamic prohibition of usury. This suspicion lingered even towards the "Islamic banks" that are prevalent throughout Malaysia, as many were not convinced that these banks are completely free of interest-based transactions. According to Haji Shabeer, one effect this had among Indian Muslim entrepreneurs was a preference for cash transactions over

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[35] The declaration of business contributions took place alongside the declaration of the bridewealth during the wedding ceremony, a practice stipulated in Islamic law.
[36] These dynamics will be explored in detail in chapter five.

banking or other financial instruments. Thus, purchases of land or other assets of the business were typically done using cash up front, mostly arranged by borrowing from others in their networks. Haji Shabeer admitted that many also opted for this in order to evade taxes. An additional motivation was the possibility of sellers offering discounts for up-front payment in cash. This created an incentive to keep cash reserves, or possibilities for quickly raising cash from within the community for such transactions. During the time of my fieldwork, however, these practices were becoming increasingly difficult to uphold – the state having implemented stringent regulations on accounting and tax policies. Almost all my interlocutors indicated that they now deal with Islamic banks in one way or another in order to comply with financial regulations.

As borrowing loans from banks began to be accepted among them, Akram complained that these created forms of debts that were "outside [the dynamics of] the community". As a religiously trained scholar (*alim*) within the community, he expressed his concern that these debts were affecting the charitable practices of his community. I had frequently seen evidence of the importance given to charitable spending practices in records of Islamic endowments (*Wakaf*) by Indian Muslims in Malaysia and India (Nasution, 2009, p.106), donation campaigns for projects back in India, or even bequests in the name of families to feed people during the month of Ramadan[37]. Akram points out that generosity is a sentiment instilled through the very public way in which it is practiced – a view reiterated by many of my other contacts. Even a lightbulb donated to a mosque would have the family name of the donor on it, Akram noted. While some engage in charity for social prestige, he says that most do it in order to invoke prayers in their names. These acts and prayers meant to benefit them in the future after death – in the grave and in the hereafter that Muslims believe in. Akram referred to a statement (*Hadith*)

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[37] This is called "*morai*" in Tamil and is still practiced in all the Indian Muslim mosques throughout Malaysia. Families compete to get their names on the "*masjid morai*" list.

of the Prophet Muhammed regarding the significance of generosity, and then went on to quote another *Hadith* that a dead person cannot be buried until their debts have been settled by the family. Among an earlier generation of entrepreneurs, he said, such sentiments instilled a concern over accumulating debts. He recalls that there was a projected sense of thriftiness while they were in Malaysia, which would shift when they visited their kin in India – where there would be conscious efforts to project generosity and charitability as a successful businessman. His nostalgic musing was juxtaposed with a lament over the accrual of bank loans in the community today – either for the business, or for a house or car. He commented that many families today no longer have reserves to bequeath for endowments or charities, but instead pass debt on to their children.

Coming from a preacher within the community, Akram's criticism of the accumulation of debt would have an effect on others from the community. It is with such uncertainties that the chapter moves on to the final section on episodic encounters of ambivalences or ambiguities brought forth by such sentiments and practices.

Ambivalent Sentiments: To Trade or not to Trade

Today, when the families of Indian Muslims have now predominantly settled in Malaysia, one aspect that many constantly talked about to me is the exposure of the children to opportunities in Malaysia, particularly for education. Members of the Tanjavur community, for example, frequently described themselves as having been at the forefront of Indian Muslim business in Malaysia until two or three decades ago. Yet the majority of those whom I encountered in Malaysia have opted to move out of the family business. They cite education as the main motivation for this, with most of them being corporate professionals, doctors, lawyers, or professors. In other Indian Muslim communities in Malaysia, too, men who have left the family

business similarly gave their reason. Some expressed reluctance to follow the stereotype of a restaurant *Mamak* that they had been confronted with from other children at school, but the primary reason was the allure of the corporate or professional life that most Malaysian youths typically aspired to. Usually at least one child from a business family was encouraged to seek a livelihood elsewhere, as a safeguard in case the family business were to collapse. However, I increasingly encountered instances of the return into the family business of a generation of young men who had previously pursued professional or corporate employment. Disillusionment with corporate life or the lure of making profits in the family business are generally the reasons they gave for their return. Others expressed an intention to return during informal conversations; this was often articulated in the context of discussions about investment opportunities and business profitability in Malaysia.

Shaduli, as the youngest in his family, was groomed as the one who would pursue employment outside the family business. He therefore enrolled at a prestigious university and upon graduation managed to gain employment in a corporation as an accountant. He found the job hectic, and the pay was not to his desire. Yet, because of the difficult job market in Malaysia for new graduates, any sort of respectable employment was deemed to be good for "CV purposes". Two years into the job, with constant efforts to be gain a better job position, the work pressure made him question the family decision. His brothers were involved in the restaurant business, and while it might not have the same prestige, they seemed to be earning more than him, as well as being much more flexible with regards to their "work-family balance". Eventually, Shaduli quit his job and decided to join the family business, even though other family members were critical of this on account of the money and time that had been invested in his education. Ultimately, he managed to convince his father about the lack of career prospects that his job offered. He now says he has much more time and money to spend on his family, even though the job is socially less prestigious.

For Shaduli, the quest for emotional fulfilment was intimately connected to satisfying economic aspirations as well. Yet in other instances, fulfilment in one area led to subsequent instability or disillusionment in another. Mannan was sent to India for high school education and returned for his graduation to Malaysia. He managed to obtain a job in the most prestigious company in Malaysia, which he saw as a big moment for him and his family. But a year into the job, he became disillusioned and complained about the stress, which conflicted with the social life he was accustomed to. He constantly returned home from work late at night, and weekends were spent at home recuperating from exhaustion. As a result, he could not participate socially in the community like other family members. Eventually he quit, much to everyone's displeasure, and joined a few Indian Muslim friends as a senior employee in a new venture.

Such choices often come under the collective purview of the family as well. Hasan, whose family owned a few small enterprises, was given an expensive education as an aeronautical engineer even though his interest was always in the business. The sudden death of his father resulted in him becoming involved in the business, which his family felt would provide him with more time to attend to their needs. In other cases, educational decisions can have unintended consequences that play out to the detriment of the family/business. Haji Shabeer, who runs a moneychanger and a few provisions stores, educated his four children with the hope that their education would help in the growth and expansion of the business. But only the second son eventually decided to become involved in the business. The other two sons and the daughter chose to take up professional employment after their studies. Haji Shabeer said that only the second son was now in a position to help support his parents financially, while the other children often complained of having little savings from their jobs.

<u>Structural Changes in the Business</u>

Beyond these personal ambivalences, certain structural changes have also produced ambivalence in connection with business practices. A negative shift in sentiments towards the family business among the younger generation meant that many are not as open to the practice of arranged marriages vital to the business expansion. Furthermore, the restaurant business, which had relied on networks in India to provide a pool of workers, found that these potential employees had begun to prefer more lucrative employment offers in the Middle East. This resulted in many families finding they could no longer effectively manage the number of branches that they had opened when it was easier to find trusted people to run them. I also encountered cases where families owned properties that were intended as bequests to their children for a future business, but which were lying dormant because the children had chosen other careers. Often the families responded to these issues by leasing out the administration of these branches or properties to third parties in return for fixed payments. These are typically taken up by new enterprising Indian Muslim migrants, who repeat the cycle of tapping into their contacts within the immediate family or unemployed youth back in India.

In response to increasingly stringent regulations on licenses and labour permits for restaurants in Malaysia, I observed a tendency for restaurant owners to corporatize by acquiring licenses and permits on a large scale – both new and existing ones. These are developed and standardized into a chain of restaurants, with everything from the menu to the uniform of the employees regulated. These are then franchised out to the highest bidders, with each branch run independently – much like American fast-food joints. This is particularly attractive for those Indian Muslims seeking to return to business from corporate or professional life. As this franchising strategy can only be undertaken by those who can make large investments, it resulted in a tendency for big players to acquire the smaller struggling ones. The management of these chains no longer depends solely on the trust provided by family, but rather emulates

corporate management techniques. I observed similar trends in the moneychanger sector as well. As Haji Shabeer told me, regulations that necessitate most transactions to be done through online banking or other accountable means have taken away from profits. Permit regulations have also been tightened, making it almost impossible to begin a moneychanger business from scratch. Consequently, the value of existing permits increases. As with the restaurants, this results in small moneychangers being gradually acquired by bigger ones.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on Indian Muslim family businesses in Malaysia and sentiments attached to their particular business practices. My emphasis was on ethnographic illustration of sentiments, rather than theoretical elaboration. The next chapter is similarly ethnographic, and explores those Indian Muslim communities who do not have a history of enterprising in Malaysia through a similar notion of "sensorium". These notions are brought together in ensuing chapters as a means of providing textures to the concept of personhood. Chapter five analyses them as practices in the domestic domain, while chapter six explores their significance on Islam in the Malaysian public sphere. These chapters provide the backdrop for exploring emotions and senses as techniques of the body (Mauss, 1973) in chapter seven, which provide outlines for conceptualizing forms of personhood among Indian Muslims in Malaysia.

Chapter IV: Sensorial Sediments

Introduction

The previous chapter looked at those Indian Muslim communities whose migration was driven by trading concerns. These migrations were gendered, whereby the women migrated if and when the business had become established. This chapter deals with two communities that migrated as families due to certain socio-economic adversity back in India. They are the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi community based mainly in Penang, and the Malabari community predominantly based in Johor. The vast majority of these families arrived in Malaya in the first half of the 20th century and followed a pattern of settling as clusters. The former community settled in the island city of Penang which was a British protectorate before Malaysia's independence in 1957. The latter ended up in rubber plantations across the country as laborers, but predominantly in rubber estates across the state of Johor. Unlike the business communities explored in the previous chapter, both of these communities have very few familial links in India today. As such, there is an underlying purpose behind the separate consideration of these two sets of communities. The pattern of migration involving a precarious movement of families with no capabilities or intentions for a return has impacted the forms of personhood observed in their social lives.

The arrival of these families was often under adverse conditions, with scant privileges of engaging in enterprising like the other Indian Muslims[38]. They did not have the same kin-based socio-economic support structures of the business communities outlined in the previous chapter. This often led to cases of class resentment between the two groups, which many argue continues to persist in subtle ways. Yet for others, the communities examined in this chapter

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[38] There are exceptions for financially privileged family migrations. The Urdu-speaking "Dakhni" community has its presence mainly in Selangor/Kuala Lumpur and Taiping. Another group of Malabari families migrated from today's Thrissur district of Kerala. Both these communities have around a hundred families in Malaysia today, while the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi and Malabari communities number on thousands.

have better adapted to the Malaysian setting through the adoption of the Malay language in their lives and a comparatively better representation among the country's civil/public officials[39]. Almost all men and women I talked to from these communities disclosed an apprehension over having collectively "lost" much of their Indian Muslim culture. During my fieldwork, certain rituals and memories attached to Islam were granted cultural attention as remnants of this culture. These were viscerally referenced by them through the senses – like sounds or tastes. It was by evoking such sensations that most of them articulated to me their experiences and narratives as Indian Muslims. My ethnography among them thereby became an attempt to apprehend and portray such sensibilities that link sensoria, places and practices.

Unlike the haphazard nature of interactions with businessmen in the previous chapter, the ethnography in this chapter is comparatively more embedded in specific localities. The Malabari community explored here is highly clustered in certain areas of Johor, with its social lives concentrated around a *Madrasa* (Islamic school) established in each of these clusters. *Ustads* (Islamic tutors) hailing from their "native land" of Kerala in India are employed in these *Madrasas*, who provide basic Islamic education to the children and conduct collective rituals for the community. The Kadayanallur-Tenkasi community is predominantly in the city of Penang, where a considerable number of them lived in public housing estates during my fieldwork. Clubs/associations established by them during the mid-20th century in Penang were claimed to be still influential in their social lives, with organised events, rituals and recreational activities for their members. The next section deals with a short methodological discussion of privileging the senses in anthropology. This is followed by a sensory ethnography of these communities (Pink, 2009) – particularly in how the senses as capacities structure relations that

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[39] These indicators have to be connected to the socio-economic context of Malaysia, which began to change drastically after its separation from Singapore in 1969 and the implementation of New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1971 (Faaland, 1990). The latter affirmative action program provided the Malay/Muslim majority of the country with possibilities of attaining certain privileges from the state as a Muslim nation (see Embong, 1996).

subsequently provide my interlocutors with an avenue to narrate their experiences. The objectivity or subjectivity of histories arising from such narratives is not my primary concern here. Rather, depictions of their historical contexts in this chapter are aimed at foregrounding their sensibilities as a mode for comprehending personhood in ensuing chapters.

Sense and Sensibility

My fieldwork among these communities typically took place for a week every month in each of the states of Johor and Penang. I subsequently followed up with those who were settled in Kuala Lumpur, where I was mainly based. It was primarily through contacts made with some of the *Ustads* of *Madrasas* in Johor that I was able to gain entry into the Malabari community. This entry point gave a crucial glimpse into the significance that these *Madrasas* were accorded by Malabaris in their social lives. The same cannot be said for the clubs in the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi community, as attempts to immerse myself into these clubs were interrupted by the Covid pandemic. Rather, my access here was primarily through some of my earlier university colleagues from this community, both male and female, who provided references and links to the broader community. These visits to Penang and Johor often anticipated participation in social events that I was notified about – religious ceremonies, marriages or community gatherings. Such immersions, which Sjørslev refers to as "unfocused presence", were often filled with boredom, but were crucial in grasping the "social rhythms" (Sjørslev, 2013, p. 97) of the communities. Besides such immersive participant observation, I arranged for appointments with key interlocutors during these visits. Various modes of unstructured interviews initially in these meetings gradually evolved into the specific form of interview based on person-centered ethnography. As elaborated in chapter two, the aim here is to explore the interlocutors' experiences and practices through long-durational face-to-face dialogues (Hollan, 2001, p. 62).

In most of these interactions, my interlocutors would express concern over not knowing their histories as Indian Muslims. These meetings were often predicated on an expectation on their part to learn more about it from me as a researcher. A narrative that was frequently conveyed to me in these meetings was of their communities gradually losing their culture. I would often have to shift the conversation to *their* ideas of this culture, which would reflectively be laid down by them to certain mundane sensations or sensory references. Examples include tonality and modulation in the performance of rituals and songs, gustatory authenticity attached to traditional diet and feasting, or claims of "envisioning" a local Indian Muslim saint in dreams. As such sensory references became increasingly prominent in my ethnography, I began to focus on these unanticipated multi-sensorial narratives and encounters that emerged through my emplacement in their environments (Pink, 2009, p. 44). This was not by isolating a particular sense-perception like sight or sound for analysis, but rather through attention to the synesthetic interplay of the senses in their lives. My fieldwork was indicative of Howes' claim that these integrated sensory experiences are collectively patterned by ideas and practices which provide a vital medium for "cultural elaboration" (Howes, 2003, p. xi). Structures of thought and practices thereby converge into a form of "common sense", such that what they described as their "cultures" became a mode of sensing the world to me.

The approach in this chapter is to situate these discourses and practices in the "person" of ongoing sensory experiences. While my encounters with these sensory data were often immediate and intriguing, these were rather cultivated and consciously engaged with by my interlocutors. It was precisely because these were accorded social significances that they were articulated to me, and subsequently provided me references to what I term as their "sensibilities". The literature on the anthropology of senses puts forward two approaches to the exploration of the senses. The first begins from the social significance attached to sense experiences to arrive at a "sensory profile" of the collective (Howes & Classen, 1991, p. 257),

particularly in the hierarchies and combinations of the senses. Sensations are largely experienced and evaluated by persons through shared/received cultural categories in this approach. The second approach, based on a critique of the first, argues for beginning from embodied perceptions of the world that are discursively constructed and creatively experienced (Ingold, 2000, p. 285). Sensations here are akin to "skills of action and perception" (Ingold, 2011, p. 314), which can be learned by an ethnographer to explore how humans inhabit the world differently. While the first approach engenders a risk of projecting bounded cultures that can blur the fluidities of collective sensibilities, the second approach risks privileging those sensory experiences that are immediate, over those that are collectively enacted and transmitted[40]. My use of the term sensibility in this chapter combines these approaches of beginning from those that are afforded collective significance, with attention paid to how discursive evocations of these affect the person's perceptions of the world.

The aim of this chapter is not to arrive at "cultural models" of Indian Muslims in Malaysia. Aesthetics of sense perception are not analysed here on an intellectualized notion of beauty, but with how ordinary sense experiences are structured. And as with emotions in the previous chapter, the emphasis is on those aspects of sensations that subsequently structure the collective, rather than a search for a pre-social or pre-cognitive dimension. In this vein, my initial approach during fieldwork was to subsume sensations within the category of emotions, which would provide an overriding link with the other Indian Muslims examined earlier. I gradually realized that the mediation of sense perception by emotions does not sufficiently capture the breadth of my interlocutors' sensorium. Rather, this chapter aims to illustrate the capacities of the senses to be "sedimented" (Connerton, 1989, p. 72) in persons, through which

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[40] There is also a particular emphasis in these approaches, more so among the former, to bring out through ethnography alternatives to "Western" sensibilities. While this is a worthy goal in itself that has a strong precedent in anthropology, too often the ethnographer is imagined as a "Western" individual in such deliberations. Reflexivity thereby becomes predicated on how he/she *does not* sense with respect to their interlocutors. Rather as with my case, this need not be the sole vantage point of ethnography.

meanings and values are acquired, expressed or conveyed. The manifold permutations of these sensoria emerged during fieldwork primarily through practices attached to certain materialities by my interlocutors. Yet, placing sensory values in objects or artefacts runs the risk of disembodying the senses, effectively making them dependent on these objects as "multisensory recording devices" (Howes, 2003, p. 44). This leaves unexplained how those sensory values are experienced by the person, as well as why and when they take on shifting or stable articulations. While there is always an element of ineffability around the sensations of others that result in a semantic gap for an ethnographer, participating in their sensory environments through my embodied presence among them allowed for a certain level of empathetic understanding. Through these empathetic attempts, my initial intrigue in some of these situational sensory encounters gradually "made sense". I take this as an avenue to reflect better in ethnographic writing what lay beyond the immediate discourses and practices attached to the sensoria of my interlocutors. The next two sections are therefore a sensory ethnography of the two respective Indian Muslim communities examined in this chapter.

Estate Migrations: Malabaris of Johor

Malabaris are a notable community in Malaysia today, who claim their origins from the southern state of Kerala in India. Most are reluctant to call themselves Indian or Indian Muslim, as they claim the term "Indian" today often connotes the Tamil language spoken by the majority of Indians in Malaysia. Rather, Malabaris emphasize their heritage of Malayalam that is spoken in Kerala, even though they have adopted Malay as their primary language of communication. For the vast majority, their arrival to Malaya was a consequence of social instability and unrest

in North Kerala during the 1920s that forced them to migrate as families[41]. As there was an increase in demand for laborers in Malaya after the First World War (Amrith, 2013), these families sailed the precarious Indian Ocean in search of a stable life. They ended up in rubber plantations spread out along Peninsular Malaysia, particularly in Johor. While most of these rubber plantations no longer exist today[42], these families were subsequently provided housing around those rubber estates, or decided to settle there (MacAndrews, 1975). Although there are small settlements of Malabaris in other places like Malacca, Selangor, Alor Setar and Perak; it was in Johor that the most significant presence of Malabaris was observed during my fieldwork[43].

The fact that I hail from Kerala in India made the task of immersing myself among them considerably easier. It was typical in these attempts to be invited home as a fellow Malabari and insisted on a meal. Particular care and emphasis would be given to serving me "authentic" homemade Malabari food, and my remarks on the food would be highly anticipated. Curiously for me in these encounters, there was more interest in listening to my experiences rather than the other way around. For one, most of them would admit to not being entirely comfortable in the Malayalam language but desired the opportunity to converse in it. Secondly, there was an enduring perception among them of possessing little knowledge of their histories and thus hoped that I could provide them with insight.

In my initial pursuit over their history, I was invariably referred to A.K. Haji, who was claimed as the last of those who had recollections of the initial migration into the country. Being above

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[41] This included a popular revolt against the British called as the "*Mapilla Lahala*" in 1921 (Dale, 1975; Panikkar, 1982), an outbreak of smallpox epidemic and resultant famine exacerbated by state policies (Priya, 2014).

[42] The Malaysian government gradually promoted diversification of crops to the more profitable palm and sugar plantations from the 1960s (Abd Aziz, 2012).

[43] I was informed of ten prominent clusters in Johor during my fieldwork – Ulu Tiram, Masai, Kluang, Kota Tinggi, Sungai Tiram, Cha'a, Simpang Rengam, Senai, Paloh and Kempas. These had a combined Malabari population claimed by my interlocutors to be around 2,000 families during my fieldwork.

eighty years of age, he was described as a respected and charismatic elder who still possessed a strong memory. Two of my interlocutors arranged for a sitting at his house and were insistent on coming along to hear our conversation. Upon arriving at Haji's house, we found a few more waiting enthusiastically to listen along, having come to know of my intentions. Over three hours of stories by Haji ensued, beginning from his memory of the initial voyage on a ship from India to his opinions on the state of the Malabari community today. The conversation was replete with sensory references, with occasional exhortations over their significance by Haji to the other listeners. He claimed that most of the migrations of Malabaris were from the second half of the 1920s until the late 1930s along coastal routes in the Indian Ocean[44]. After sailing in crowded passenger ships and undergoing an initial quarantine at Klang Port, they were encountered by labor agents who promised them work at rubber estates, railways or mining sites. The debts of these families were cleared up by these agents initially in return for bonded labor for a year or two[45]. Most of the Malabari families moved in groups into rubber estates in Johor, Pahang, Perak and Alor Setar - labouring alongside predominantly Tamil workers and overseen by the British. Often being the only Muslims in these estates made the Malabaris assert their religion as their marker. He related that this was primarily through attire – colour choices of green and white with a skull cap for the men, and white or black for the women. But other sensory symbols were invoked – like particular dietary choices, recitation of traditional songs and prayers; as well as rituals attached to marriage, puberty, circumcision or funerals. Both men and women had to work in the fields from morning until evening to sustain the family. The overpowering smell of rubber, withered hands from tapping the trees, the sunburnt

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[44] This corresponds with existing historical studies which show that the migration of Indian labour peaked during this time. The British-Indian government put a stop to the migration of indentured labor in 1938 due to increasing complaints of exploitation and oppression in rubber estates in Malaya (Sandhu, 2010; Hagan, 2005).

[45] While most of the Indian labor in Malaya was through the notorious *Kangani* indenture system, the arrival of most Malabaris coincided with the Great Depression period which saw fluctuations in rubber prices. By the time most Malabaris arrived in rubber estates, the inhumane practices of these *Kangani* indentures had significantly faded away to more union-based employment (Kaur, 1998, p.85).

skin from the fields and the sensation of money caressed in one's palm were frequent references from him and other interlocutors who worked in plantations.

Madrasa: The Sensory Locus

Most of my interlocutors, though, were of a younger generation that did not work in these plantations. Common recollections among them were of extensive time for leisure when the parents worked in the fields. Most of them would be placed under the supervision of *Mollakas* (an earlier term for *Ustad*), who often lived amongst them and fulfilled their collective Islamic functions and rituals. Echoes of the songs and prayers taught by these *Mollakas* would reverberate in their recollections, which would typically be the link that shifts our conversations to the presence and significance of *Madrasa* among them. Early on in my fieldwork, I was told by Mr Ali (encountered in the previous chapter) about the importance that Malabaris in Johor attached to these *Madrasas* run by *Ustads* trained in traditional Islamic seminaries in Kerala. He and many others suggested that these *Ustads* could provide an entry point into the social lives of the community. It was after managing to make contact with two *Ustads* in a supposedly prominent Malabari *Madrasa* in Johor that I initially immersed myself among them, travelling for five hours from Kuala Lumpur to Johor in the first week of November for an initial stay of a week.

The *Madrasa* was based in a two-storey building that had classrooms on both floors, as well as a modest accommodation for the five *Ustads* employed there. The whiteboard on one of the walls showed the student count to be 110 children. The students attend the *Madrasa* from 5-8 pm daily after regular school and *Agama* classes[46]. The boys are dressed in white *kurtas* and white skull caps, while the girls wear an all-black *abaya* that reveals only their faces and hands. This black-and-white contrast is vividly expressed in how the genders are segregated in the

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[46] *Agama* refers to religion in Malay. It is compulsory for Muslim students to attend Islamic courses at school in Malaysia, while non-Muslims have to take up an "ethics" module.

classroom and during prayer. The boys typically sit on the right side of the classroom with the

girls on the left, while the *Ustads* walk in the space between to monitor them. During prayers

led by the *Ustads*, the boys occupy the front space while the girls are placed at the back. I was

initially confronted with a paradoxical situation in the *Madrasa*. These students do not have

fluency in Malayalam, while the *Ustads* have little to no knowledge of Malay – effectively

ruling out a common language of communication. On inquiring with the *Ustads* about what

goes on during the classes, I was informed that the only expectation by the parents is for the

children to be familiarized with particular Islamic prayers in Arabic (*Selawat*) and songs in

Malayalam that are considered by them to be of Malabari tradition. Particular emphasis was

placed on the tone and melody of the recitation, based on how it is recited in Kerala as indicated

by the *Ustads*. I was frequently told that the "Malay style" of recitation of *Selawat* is melodious,

while the Malabari style is more sombre. The *Ustads* as well would often comment to me that

the children typically recite their prayers "like Malays", owing to their exposure from schools

and through television programs. Such sonic proprieties become a crucial form of marking

boundaries that create dispositions of belonging. Eisenlohr argues that these proprieties should

not be reduced to an underlying meaning or value, but examined on how they entangle with

practices to engender specific knowledge and sensations (Eisenlohr, 2018, p. 7). But while

Eisenlohr goes on to link the analysis of sounds to the emotions produced spatially through the

notion of "atmospheres" (Eisenlohr, 2018, p. 91), my approach is to take up the interplay of all

the senses as being sedimented in the person. Senses then become modalities that can be

entangled with emotions to engender sensibilities, but not necessarily mediated through

emotions only[47].

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[47] Thus, while the "atmosphere" in Eisenlohr *exudes* from the person and objects, I also consider later in the chapter the possibility of the senses themselves mediating an arrival into the person through rituals, memories and dreams. In other words, the arrival of certain sensations is valorized by my interlocutors.

<u>Healing Sensations</u>

A particularly prominent *Selawat* was *Manqus Maulud* – a prose poetry in Arabic composed by a scholar from Kerala in praise of the Prophet Muhammed[48]. The *Ustads* mention that they were accustomed back in Kerala to reciting it usually in the month of the Prophet's birthday. But among the Malabaris in Malaysia, the *Ustads* are requested to recite it on special occasions, and by some as often as every Thursday night. As such, the children are encouraged to learn it by heart, or at least be familiar with it. It was reportedly written during an epidemic in Kerala in the 16th century and was intended as a mode of healing (*Shifaa*) for the people[49]. Among my interlocutors, such intents are strongly continued through certain practices frequently demanded from the *Ustads*. Most commonly, they are requested to recite the *Manqus Maulud* at the homes of families undergoing difficulties. *Ustads* occasionally informed me of visiting a house where a person was sick, having been requested to recite the *Maulud* and other *Selawat*. Talismanic practices (*Ruqya*) of reciting prayers into a glass or bottle of water to be consumed by suffering persons are another example. Alternatively, *Ustads* would recite a prayer and then ritually blow onto the person's body[50]. The ailment can be from severe physical illness to even small issues of forgetfulness. It can also be to invoke prayers and blessings upon a person before a new stage or venture in their life. An *Ustad* once received a phone call from Idris requesting the recitation of *Maulud* at his house, as his daughter was about to enrol at a university. The *Ustad* inquired if I could come along, to which Idris gladly agreed. The recitation took place in the evening, with the men among the extended family being present. This was followed by a grand dinner that was again gendered, where the *Ustad* and I were

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[48] *Mawlid/Maulud* is a tradition practiced across the Muslim world on his birthday, corresponding to the Arabic lunar month of *Rabi Al Awwal*. The *Mawlid* (literally meaning "birth" in Arabic) typically involves prose-poetry recited to invoke love for the Prophet Muhammed in the listeners. In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, it is colloquially referred to as *Maulud*.

[49] See Arafath's chapter for an overview of healing traditions among Muslims in South India (Arafath, 2016).

[50] Such bodily interactions are highly gendered. Thus, the latter practice of ritual blowing was observed with the male and children, while the healing for women occurred via water.

accorded great respect. Yet on returning after the function, I curiously noted to the *Ustad* that we had not seen the daughter throughout the event. To this, he responded as a matter of fact that she was a mature woman and therefore will avail of the blessing through the water placed in front of him during the recital.

While the *Ustads* often expressed slight reservations on being frequently requested for such recitals, they nonetheless carried them out owing to the particular rank accorded to them by the Malabaris. Some would be more sought out than others based on the effectiveness of previous performances. Yet, the *Ustads* would always express their humility of not having achieved anywhere near the status required to make such acts effective, which they claim are reserved for a select few of high spiritual rank. While there are significantly more prominent and esteemed Malays in Johor among them that perform such rituals[51], it is to these *Ustads* that the Malabaris more often turn. An influential and often invoked strand in the anthropological literature on such healing practices is the work of Thomas Csordas (Csordas, 1994), which focuses on the multiplicity of meanings generated through the immediacy of embodied healing experiences. Contrary to the emphasis placed by him on the consciousness of such experiences and the subsequent notion of selfhood, my interactions steered me again to its entanglement in social relations and notions of collective belonging.

These collective impulses are crucially sustained by the *Madrasa* being the site for ritual or social gatherings of the community. Such congregations are attended by the Malabari families in the local vicinity, most of whom would usually assemble for the Thursday night *Selawat*[52]. In the gatherings I attended, the *Ustads* commenced recitations sitting on the floor of a big hall, with the children facing them cross-legged after class hours. The men gradually arrived dressed

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[51] These could be those who have lineages linked to the Prophet Muhammed (*Sayyids*), religious scholars (*Alims*) or spiritual leaders of a Sufi *Tariqa.*
[52] There are usually three *Selawat* typically recited among them–*Manqus Maulud, Badr Maulud* and *Sharraful Anaaam*. Another one that is increasingly being recited is the *Majlis Al-Noor*. All of them are based on traditions brought over by *Ustads* from Kerala.

for the occasion and sit attentively leaning against the walls, while the women occupy an adjacent room. Bottles of water with their lids open were placed in front of the *Ustads* while they recited the *Selawat*, to allow the blessings (*Baraka*) of the recitations to seep into the water. These were distributed among the attendees later to be consumed. After an hour of recitation of the *Selawat*, the men sat outside to have dinner laid out on tables, while the women ate inside the building. The men were all keen to point out to me that the food was Malabari – rice or *Pathiri* with Malabari curry.

Recollections of Sensory Delights

In this sense, food and feasting was a recurring topic during my fieldwork. This emerged frequently as well on listening to the recorded conversation with A.K. Haji on life in the rubber estates. Rice, still the staple food among them, was earlier rationed off at the estates according to him. This meant that it was used preciously, but the taste of rice had sedimented in them such that other foods rarely satisfied as a substitute during lunch. In addition, tapioca (*Kappa*) grown in their yards was occasionally the main component of dinner after work in the fields[53]. Meat at that time was a luxury that was usually reserved for special occasions like *Eid* or weddings; typically eaten with *Pathiri* – a flatbread made from rice flour. Generally, the financial capacity of the host only permitted senior men and women among relatives and neighbours in an estate to be invited to the wedding feast. Certain Malabari troops in Malaysia would perform songs (*Mappila Pattu*) and the *Daff Muttu* (traditional dance with a drum) for such events. Halimatha, a senior Malabari lady whom I had the privilege of interviewing, relates that the lavishness of the marriage ceremony was expressed in the number of chickens slaughtered and cooked for the guests. Being from a comparatively prosperous family among them, her daughter's marriage feast was of 15 chickens – considered grand for her day. Through

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[53] Kratoska provides historical references for the encouragement of tapioca planting as a response to food shortage in the mid-20th century in Malaya (Kratoska, 2018, p. 267). A. K. Haji emphatically conveyed to the listeners how tapioca ought to be accorded a particular respect by the Malabaris.

such recollections, food becomes a medium through which the community comes to the "surface of daily life" (Palmer, 1998, p. 182). The blend of sights and sounds with taste and smell here engenders immediate synesthetic experiences that Sutton perceptively argues provide a "strategy of dealing with the inchoate", as well as a cultural elaboration of the senses that are non-linguistic (Sutton, 2001, p. 84, 91).

A.K. Haji went on to relate a particularly difficult time during the Japanese invasion of Malaya during the Second World War (Kratoska, 2018), and their subsequent withdrawal made the situation at these rubber estates more tolerable. Small stalls and shops run by Malabari entrepreneurs began emerging inside these estates, although their relations with the Malabaris engaged in the fields were not necessarily smooth[54]. They began introducing new food and merchandise into the plantations[55]. Many of them provided a point of contact with their relatives back in Kerala and assisted in remitting them money. They would also arrange for procuring particular functional Malabari men in the country – like *Mollaka* (Islamic preachers) for ceremonies, rituals and festivals. The other was the *Ossaan* – whose primary duty was trimming hairs and circumcisions of boys. He would also occasionally administer traditional healing and medicine if he was qualified. My male interlocutors often had strong recollections of their circumcisions, which were typically done around the age of six. The term used for the ritual (*Sunnath Kalyanam*) has an allegorical reference to a wedding, with the young boy kept in well regard for a few days before his circumcision. He would be visited by men who would seek his forgiveness and shower him with gifts or money. On the day of the circumcision, there would be a public recital of prayers followed by a special bath given to the boy with traditional soaps and oils. The *Ossaan* would then arrive holding his surgical instrument, while men gather

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[54] These stalls were mainly groceries or restaurants. There used to be a class resentment towards the businessmen "*Vadakkanmaar*" (Northerners) by the estate Malabari "*Thekkenmaar*" (Southerners).

[55] These included *Porotta* (Indian flat bread), curry and milk tea. AK Haji claims that one bread costed 15 cents, while tea was priced at 20. It was understood that 4 Rupees a day were sufficient to survive for a household.

to watch the circumcision and later feast. The women, similarly, had vivid memories of their initial puberties and rituals attached to them. The smell of sesame oil and the taste of raw eggs, which were served during this time to the girl, were frequently invoked. Women would congregate in their houses – often with gifts and sweets. They would advise the girl on proprieties and etiquettes, most importantly on being confined to the house during this initial menstrual period. They would also impart the proper way of taking a bath (*Ghusl*) after the period – by applying turmeric paste over the body and sesame oil on the head, and then washing them away with traditional soap. The girl would then be gifted new clothes and jewellery for the occasion of stepping out of the house again[56]. While many of these recollections appear to be ostensibly unpleasant memories (circumcision, ritual confinement or taste of raw eggs), the delightful sensations attached to such memories were always emphasized by these senior interlocutors.

Sensing Home

Mr Yacob was a middle-aged Malabari who was almost single-handedly funding and administering the *Madrasa* I was based at. In an intimate conversation we later had between us, he related how he had little attachment to the community during his adolescence. With recurring problems in his house, particularly with the ailing health of his mother, he was forced to take up hard labor at the industries in Johor and neighbouring Singapore. There was a sense during these times for him that the Malabari community was not supportive of their plight, and as such, he typically kept his distance from them. One of the *Ustads* at that time suggested to his family that his mother be taken to Kerala in India for treatment, to which he was vehemently opposed. "Why should we take her to a far-away country we have no acquaintance of"? The father eventually decided to take the risk, and Mr Yacob reluctantly followed them to Kerala

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[56] Moiden, a Malabari academic, provides an article that corroborates these female rituals (Moiden, 2021).

to be with his mother. But he was struck by the sensory environment upon arrival – of "a long-forgotten home" as he phrased it. The sight of millions of other people like him, the sounds of conversations and prayers, and the familiar smells and tastes all brushed aside his earlier reluctance. There was one particular sound that he kept hearing in the mornings which he initially couldn't figure out, or why it was having a particular reminiscent effect on him. It was the constant sound of a distant, but loud, "thud". Upon inquiring with the person of the house he was staying in, he was pointed out to a woman in the backyard who was washing clothes by beating the wet cloth on a flat stone. This brought back sights and sounds of his childhood memories, where an earlier generation of Malabari women washed clothes the same way back in Malaysia.

He described his gradual realization that the Malabaris are not simply a small community in Malaysia, but a larger one with a wide network and a rich tradition. He enrolled at a local *Madrasa* for a short while, to pass the time in Kerala until his mother's health improved. After eight months in the *Madrasa*, he returned with his family back to Johor and started becoming more involved with the Malabari community affairs. He ventured into a business on a modest scale, while also being invested in improving a local *Madrasa* in Johor. His business only kept improving despite spending a significant part of the revenue to administer the *Madrasa* and employ more *Ustads* from Kerala. This he took as a sign of *Baraka* (Divine blessing), and eventually became even more committed to the community. By the time during my fieldwork, his *Madrasa* was the major one among the Malabaris in Johor, employing five *Ustads* from Kerala and having more than a hundred students.

Remembrance of the *Madrasa* Sensed

In my subsequent visits to Johor, I ventured to other settlements specifically to observe if the same social dynamic of the *Madrasas* played out. All these settlements had a *Madrasa* and at least one *Ustad* from Kerala in charge. When interacting with the local Malabaris, the

Madrasas and *Ustads* were always narrated as the focal point of their social lives. On inquiring about its history, all of the senior interlocutors would reminisce over an *Oathu Muri* (literally Recitation room) earlier in their estate lives, where a *Mollaka* educated the young on Islam[57]. The *Mollakas* were feared by the children for the physical punishment they would mete out, which was often encouraged by the parents for disciplining the child. An oft-relayed memory was the practice by the parents of a newly enrolled student to distribute sweet delicacies to the *Ustads* and students in the *Madrasa*, typically sweet porridge (*Madra Kanji*). The arrival of a new student would be met with joyous anticipation and chatter over the delicacies that would be handed out. The tunes and rhythms of the Qur'an or prayers being recited, or songs being sung, were described to me vividly; as well as the chorus echoing from the students rocking to and fro while being seated on the floor. Curiously enough, the same rocking motion occured when I request them to recite the prayers or the songs. Once when seated with a few Malabaris, I inquired if they could recite a prayer without the rocking motion, which all of them found it difficult. Yassin and Baseer could not recall the verses unless they moved their upper bodies back and forth, while Alvi exclaimed that it felt "improper" upon failing to get the lines right.

While these *Oathu Muri* in each estate was usually a small premise that had few facilities, the estate in Cha'a set up a *Madrasa* that was dedicated to a better-equipped space for religious education and social gathering[58]. This was followed by a *Madrasa* in Masai that was collectively called as the Masai Muslim Jamaat (MMJ) in 1974. While these premises initially employed Malay women to teach the children, the *Madrasa* in Masai attempted to hire a qualified *Ustad* from Kerala by raising money from within the community. Preparations were also made to impart Islamic knowledge to the youth and adult men through *Pattu Kitab dars* (Ten book sessions). There was a particular enchantment over the books brought over from

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[57] These included the basic aspects referred to by them as "Deeniyyaat" and "Amaliyyaat" (vaguely translated as "elements of faith" and "elements of ritual acts" respectively), along with didactic songs and stories.

[58] I was unable to obtain the exact year of this event – but many lay it around the 1950s.

Kerala – the touch, sights and smells of its pages. Gradually, my interlocutors told me, *Madrasas* became established in all the other estates with a significant Malabari population[59]. While many are now struggling to maintain their student count and finance *Ustads* from Kerala, they are still taken up by the elders and act as the focal point of their social organisation. Each *Madrasa* still has its informal alumni networks that frequently contributed to its financing and administration.

Ambivalent Sensations

Many of my interlocutors described how the Malays often glowingly remark upon the Malabari community's commitment to these *Madrasas*, in effect becoming symbolic of their commitment to Islam. The broader association of Malabaris in Johor, 'Jemaah Malabar Muslim Negeri Johor' (JMMNJ), is predominantly concerned with the running of these *Madrasas*. The association hires a permanent employee that looks after the bureaucratic affairs of all the *Ustads*, an issue that is becoming complicated with the centralization of Islamic education in Johor[60]. Mr Yacob tells me of an incident with the state Ministry of Religious Affairs, whose representatives were requesting the Malabari *Madrasas* to adopt the national syllabus typically adopted by the other publicly funded *Madrasas*. This would imply hiring *Ustads* who were trained in Malaysia, and foregoing the practice of bringing them from Kerala. Mr Yacob and others of the association were at pains to insist that their syllabus taught by *Ustads* from Kerala was the only tangible component they had left of their "culture". Although the Ministry contingently agreed to recognize them, many foresee possibilities of gradually having to accede to the mainstream Malaysian syllabi.

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[59] At the time of my fieldwork, there were 11 *Madrasas* spread out along Johor state – Ulu Tiram, Sungai Tiram, Masai, Senai, Kluang, Cha'ah, Paloh, Simpang Rengam, Kota Tinggi, Kempas and Muar. The pandemic had created a sense of uncertainty regarding the future of most of these *Madrasas*, along with recurring administrative problems with visas for *Ustads*.

[60] The bureaucratic aspect will be examined in chapter six.

Despite such significance attached to *Madrasas* by the community, the *Ustads* conveyed no impressions of having substantial authority over the community. While the Malabaris frequently described the *Ustads* as their "ambassadors" from India, most of the *Ustads* expressed a sense of being "employees" and bound by the duration of their visas in Malaysia. They all expressed their desires to improve the *Madrasa* syllabi beyond the basic *Selawat* and songs, and implement a more structured Islamic education. But this was often met with pushback from the community, for whom these *Madrasa* spaces were primarily a means of holding on to their Malabari traditions. Yet there was an inculcated practice of bestowing respect towards the *Ustads* among the Malabaris, particularly by hosting them for a meal. I was once invited along with a few *Ustads* for dinner at a Malabari house, where the host was particularly gracious in feeding us. He made a point of telling us later that he wanted his children to observe the deference that *Ustads* are supposed to be granted. I also frequently observed families sending over food to the *Ustads* through their children. Yet the Ustads complain that this practice rather projects a perception to these children of *Ustads* waiting for these handouts. It was thus not uncommon to observe the students mocking the *Ustads* over this, having myself been mistaken for an *Ustad* by a student and sarcastically inquired in broken Malayalam if my stomach was full.

The *Madrasas* were thus ambivalent spaces of authenticity and tradition for a community who generally perceived themselves to be "losing" their culture; the authenticity being mediated primarily through the presence of *Ustads* from Kerala who invoke and invigorate particular sensibilities among the Malabaris. These sensibilities are often synesthetic, wherein stimulation of one sensory register engenders responses in other sensory modes. Thus, the authenticity attached to the tonality of reciting *Maulud* and *Selawat*, the rocking motion of the body it engenders in those reciting or listening, the healing capacities that become transmitted into one's body through its recitation, and the gustatory references invoked through traditional

cuisines served in conjunction with the *Selawat* are instances of such synaesthetic sensibilities. These may or may not be complemented with invocations of memories, discourses or emotions; but were nonetheless consciously transmitted to the next generation as their tradition or culture. It is in this *sense* that the senses become "sedimented" in the person, the sensorium being the primary site through which Malabari sensibilities were reproduced and maintained.

Urban Family Enclaves: The Kadayanallur and Tenkasi Community of Penang

While gathering the narratives of Indian Muslim restaurants in Malaysia examined in the previous chapter, I frequently came across the mention of Indian Muslim women in Penang who hailed from a place called Kadayanallur in India. It was these women who had provided the Indian Muslim food vendors with the service of grinding the curry spices vital to their cuisine. On inquiring about these women, I became exposed to a significant community of Indian Muslims in Penang who hail from Kadayanallur and Tenkasi in Tamil Nadu, India[61]. Both these cities were historically associated with a vibrant cotton-weaving industry until the mid-19th century. Subsequent experiences of famines and droughts by the local population saw a significant attempt at migration to Malaya around the beginning of the 20th century[62]. Unlike most other indentured migrations to colonial estates or rubber plantations though, the Muslim families from Kadayanallur and Tenkasi opted to settle in the urban spaces of Penang and Singapore[63]. Through such claims of a different history and pattern of migration into Malaysia,

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[61] Kadayanallur and Tenkasi are cities in the district of Tenkasi (formerly Tirunelveli) in Tamil Nadu, located approximately 100km away from the Bay of Bengal coast that facilitated the migration of Indians into Malaya.

[62] With the growth of industrialized cotton manufacturing in Britain and USA by the 19th century, the British administration in India imposed exorbitant taxes on Indian cotton as a means of monopolizing the sector. This led to the closure and loss of livelihood to traditional cotton weavers like those in Tenkasi and Kadayanallur.

[63] Saidumasudu has written a dissertation in Malay language of the history of this community in Penang (Saidumasudu, 2015). Tschacher has done extensive research on these communities in Singapore (Tschacher, 2017; 2007). Unfortunately, I was able to interact with those in Singapore only once during fieldwork, owing to the pandemic and resultant travel restrictions between the countries.

these interlocutors frequently expressed a certain distance from the other Indian Muslims predominantly engaged in entrepreneurship.

I fortuitously found a few colleagues from my postgraduate days from this community who provided an entry point for me. With very few links back in India today, most of them are third or fourth-generation descendants of those who had initially migrated. My experiences and observations among them in Penang were in many ways similar to those among Malabaris in Johor. Similar to the Malabaris, Malay was the primary language spoken, and there was a conscious adoption of Malay attire in public. Intriguingly for me, the Indian Muslim markers in my interactions among them were always about the sensoria like the Malabaris. My fieldwork immersion among them was not as deep as with the Malabaris though. The Covid pandemic and subsequent lockdowns hit Malaysia in March 2020 just as I was familiarizing myself with the community[64].

A Sense of Struggle in Memories

As I was building a network of interlocutors through my friends and their extended families, I became introduced to Mr Qasim – a retired civil employee who was in the process of writing a short history of the community. As a senior member in the community, he was rather critical of his generation who he claimed were often reluctant in affirming their history in the country. One need not be proud of it, he claimed, as he was very critical of many aspects of his community's traditions. Yet he always insisted that their struggles were nevertheless vital to the comforts that the community was enjoying in the country. According to him, most of them were historically linked to cotton weaving and farming back in Kadayanallur and Tenkasi. They migrated as families out of desperation to British-controlled Penang and Singapore during

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[64] Yet the contacts I had among them were particularly insightful with regard to the domestic and bureaucratic domains that I explore in the subsequent chapters.

the early 20th century[65], via British or Dutch passenger ships. Opting to settle in urban areas unlike the other Tamil laborers, they settled as a cluster of families that lived close together in central areas of the island[66]. This was typically in rented apartments of old buildings – often two or three families in a single house. The men initially sought employment mostly as unskilled labor around the Penang port – as dock workers or office boys (peons), while others sold vegetables, meat or fish[67]. In the initial period after migration, Mr Qasim related how owning a bicycle (more often second-hand) was a matter of prestige among the men. While other Indian Muslims were present on the island during that time, there were little relations with them. With most of them being comparatively more privileged entrepreneurs, Mr Qasim recounted how those Indian Muslims often looked down upon his community. Subsequent interactions with others gave me the impression that this class resentment, besides its economic underpinning of privilege, had to do as well with the emotional practices illustrated in the previous chapter that those from the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi community did not share.

An instance of this was the particular proprieties attached to women's engagement in the market. During the initial period after migration, most of the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi women were engaged in the grinding of curry spices, particularly for the Indian Muslim *Nasi Kandar* explored in the previous chapter (Nasution, 2002). Many of the elder women recounted to me of particular premises below or near their houses that had grinding pins and stones; as well as large pestles with mortars in which they would begin grinding the spices from the morning. Mrs Halima recalled how the spices were filled in used tin cans that were either sold on credit to the *Nasi Kandar* men, or distributed door to door. While these were often narrated to me by those outside the community as instances of their socio-economic inferiority at that time, the

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[65] Some others were insistent though that their families migrated even prior in the late 19th century.
[66] The draft writeup he shared with me states that the families settled within 1km radius around Jalan A.S. Mansoor (Halfway Road), Jalan Ariffin, Jalan Chulia, Jalan Argyll, Jalan Kedah, Jalan Hatim and Jalan Dindings.
[67] See Pillai's work for corroboration (Pillai, 2015, p. 12).

recollections of these memories by women and men within the community were linked to a sense of pride in their initial struggles in the country. Thus, Mrs Halima reminisced about particular Tamil folk songs that would be sung in chorus by the women during work. Mrs Aisha recounted how rain could often disrupt their work, as they did not have adequate facilities to keep the powders dry. I was shown some of this traditional equipment in two houses I visited, as well as being informed by others of having it preserved as artefacts of memory. On relating this to two of my younger female interlocutors, they recalled how they were never allowed to touch these tools at their grandmothers' houses, despite never having seen them being used.

Masculine Shades of Communal Sensibilities

From the time of their migration, they were internally stratified along religious groups or *tariqas* that existed back in Kadayanallur and Tenkasi[68]. These groups took on the moniker of "clubs" or "associations" among them in Penang[69], which Amrith claims was a characteristic organisational feature in Malaya at that time (Amrith, 2013, p. 176). The congregations at these clubs were often for religious ceremonies – wedding rituals, circumcisions, funerals, *Mawlids* or *Selawat*. My interlocutors frequently pointed out that they also served as recreational spaces for men. Most of the clubs had facilities and teams for badminton, *Sepak*, chess, and checkers; as well as a reading room. One association even had a musical band that played Hindi, Tamil or Malay songs for gatherings or weddings. Since it was usual to have two or three families living in a single house at that time (Nasution, 2002, p. 68), the men gravitated to these clubs after work primarily to provide the women at home with privacy. The clubs all had an Islamic functionary who was usually a representative of the respective *tariqa*. This position was often

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[68] Dr Siraj informed me that the groups were called *Mele Kakshi, Keele Kakshi*, *Tangal Kakshi* and *Kondotty Kakshi* (see Tschacher, 2007; pg. 91 for the same among those in Singapore). Mr Qasim recalls the names of three leaders – Sheik Udman Chisti/Lebbai, Haja Bandanebas and Tangal, whose followers had migrated to Penang.

[69] These were the United Muslim Association, Anjuman Himayatul Islam and Hidayathul Islam Association all formed in 1929. The Tenkasi Muslim Society emerged later in 1946. Following certain frictions between groups, an umbrella body called Central Muslim Society (CMS) was formed in the 1950s.

handed down within their families, with their children often sent to India or other countries to obtain and further Islamic knowledge. Nowadays, these associations all had an Islamic representative from within their community who carry out their particular rituals and other Islamic communal obligations.

Cultured Tongues

An interesting observation for me, when compared to other Indian Muslims, was that people from this community rarely ventured into business. One notable exception is an extended Tenkasi family that has a continuing tradition of providing catering services for weddings and feasts among them, wherein their traditional cuisines are preserved and sustained. I was frequently pointed out that it is only among these families that Tamil is still extensively spoken at home. Sarah, who hails from one of these families, lays it down to the practice of their children engaging in the family business from a young age. The notion of "mother tongue" as the language at the tip of one's tongue was laid down to the collective practice of engaging in this family business. One of these families is also into the business of curry-spice powders, for which the women from this community were earlier recognised. While contemporary women no longer engage in this trade like before, there are a few women who have taken up the production of these spices using more improved technologies. Referred to by its Malay name *Giling Rempah* (ground spices), these are circulated among the community for daily use. As most women seek employment outside their domestic spheres today, such "instant" powders are said to be time-saving when cooking at home after work. The authenticity of their traditional food was often laid down to particular brands of curry powders. "Homely food", for many of my interlocutors, was when these spice powders were added to the curries – these being described as "more watery" than Malay curries[70].

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[70] The tongue as a site that reproduces spaces of familiarity will be explored more deeply in the next chapter.

It was through such gustatory references in self-descriptions of their culture that the community came to the "surface of daily life" (Palmer, 1998, p. 182). Mr Khaja humorously recounted stories of men from their community who married Malay women, all of whom would constantly reminisce and long for their traditional food that their wives did not know how to cook. "You see, our tongues are different [from the Malays]" he perceptively said. The tongue here is a metaphor – the "fulcrum" of synesthetic sensations ubiquitous in the practice of having a meal (Lalonde, 1992, p. 77). While these will be spatialized as domestic practices in the next chapter, it is pertinent to point out the interplay of the senses here. The authenticity of taste has to be complimented with the proper smell and textures. Given the traditional way of eating with one's fingers, touch is a crucial aspect of sensing the food. All these converge in the evaluation of the tastebuds when placed on the tongue and subsequently digested in the stomach. Upon asking Mr Khaja if the new generation in his community have the same "tongue" as his, his face registered a frown. "If we don't feed them our food, then how can it remain the same?" This non-linguistic mode of cultural elaboration rested on the knowledge of traditional recipes by women for him, which he laments is being lost upon the younger generation. The sensibilities engendered by the sedimentation of such tastes were being counteracted by the increasing consumption of other food in their lives. Yet for Nisha in the business of instant curry spices, their *giling rempah* was a strategy that allowed them to hold on to their culture despite shifting contexts.

The Sensational *Makam* Dato Koyah

When the community initially settled in Penang, it happened to be around the tomb (*Makam*) of Syed Mustapha Idris – an Indian Muslim saint also referred to as Dato Koyah. Little is known of him by those in Penang today, but I was frequently told that he had come from Kerala to Penang in the late 18th century. He is claimed to have performed miracles and lived a saintly life that resulted in a *Makam* being erected over his grave. The initial Kadayanallur and Tenkasi

migrants had arrived after his death, but respected and revered the *Makam* that lay amidst them. Those of the early generations recall the practice of families contributing oil or kerosene, poured into a container at the *Makam*, for keeping its lamps alight. Occasional Islamic rituals conducted here by the *tariqas* among them, attended by the men from their respective clubs. The smell of rosewater emanating from a bowl placed in the middle during these rituals was frequently invoked by interlocutors. Newlywed couples visited the *Makam* to seek blessings before they enter their homes. This would be in the form of a procession, where the entire invitees to the wedding would follow along and recite *Nasheeds* (Islamic songs) in Tamil.

As most of the community moved away from this locality to other parts of Penang after the 1970s, *Makam* Dato Koyah gradually came to be in a neglected state. At the turn of the 21st century, the *Makam* architecture was in such a bad state that some claimed to have been afraid of entering the premises. The city heritage council declared it a 'Category I site' – implying that it required urgent repair. An association was formed that was entrusted with the upkeep of the *Makam* (*Persatuan Warisan Dato Koyah*), which approached a local heritage restoration team in 2012 for help[71]. Many members conveyed to me the multitude of discussions that went about between them on the manner it should be restored. A replica of the original wooden door of the *Makam* was brought over from Myanmar, and the memories of the community were widely adhered to in the restructuring of the walls and spaces. In particular, spaces for ritual gathering and feasting within the *Makam* compound were designated to bring back the earlier practices of the community. With a lot of good fortune and support from the community, Mr Rafi related, the restoration of *Makam* Dato Koyah was done in a manner that received wide acclaim in public media.

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[71] Think City Project was the name of the local team, which was interestingly assisted by Gwynn Jenkins – an anthropologist by education who works on architectural conservation of Penang Island. The restoration was also helped by the fact that UNESCO had declared the Georgetown area of Penang as a World Heritage Site a few years earlier, which immensely helped promote the cause of the *Makam*.

Today, the *Makam* is a popular heritage site located at the heart of the city. On the walls surrounding the *Makam*, the histories and narrations of the Dato Koyah and Kadayanallur-Tenkasi community are laid out for visitors. *Selawat* are conducted on the premises every Thursday evening, followed by a feast of *Kanji* (rice porridge) and other cuisines considered traditional. Some of the caretakers informed of plans to exhibit more traditional artefacts and memories – like herbal spices, clothing and migration narratives. They were insistent that it was the new generation within the community who were the primary target audience – a loss of community-feeling among them frequently expressed as a reason for these restoration ideas. My preliminary impression was of general support and pride over the *Makam*, particularly from the clubs and associations, but a more extensive exploration was disrupted by the Covid pandemic.

Dreams Envisioned

There was one particular way that this was expressed that intrigued me as it kept recurring in conversations over the *Makam*. Two men initially recounted in passing that they had seen Dato Koyah in their dreams. In my subsequent visit to Penang, two other men and a woman also claimed to have had a vague dream of the saint. None of them had vivid recollections of the dream, except for only a fleeting glance of the saint that persisted with them after waking up. I raised this issue with Mr Rasyid, whom I had built a good rapport with. Despite being from the community, he had been critical of his community over the *Makam* – calling it "shrine-adoration" and objecting to it as "*Shirik*" (un-Islamic). Yet, his response elicited even more surprise for me. "So what?" he exclaimed, "I also saw him in a dream, but that doesn't make him holy!". On inquiring if the dream had any meaning for him, he denied having given it much thought. I could sense that he was not too keen on where our conversation was going. He hesitantly admitted that it might have had a nostalgic effect on him, while quickly downplaying any Islamic significance to it. One of the caretakers at the *Makam* later informed me that it was

not infrequent that people would randomly show up at the *Makam* claiming to have seen Dato Koyah in a dream.

While dreams have been extensively explored in anthropological literature, of immediate relevance here is Crapanzano's claim that dreams can be simultaneously evocative and performative (Crapanzano, 2001). It is in this ambiguity of dreams, whether it prophesizes a future act/event or causes it, that they often become compelling. Mittermaier's extensive study of dreams among Muslims in Egypt also points to a rich tradition within Islam that my interlocutors often invoked – or contested, in the case of Mr Rasyid. She makes an important claim of how we ought to consider the possibility that dispositions can come *through* dreams, rather than as an egoistic imperative that *reaches into* one's dream (Mittermaier, 2010, p. 171). Her studies attempt to make a broader argument of how dreams can be a particular site of imagination that provide alternative modes of religiosity or ethical considerations for a person (Mittermaier, 2012, p. 250). I would complement these arguments by directing attention to how dreams also involve a particular mode of sensing. The Dato Koyah is always metaphorically described as "seen" or "envisioned", even though none of them can particularly recall his face. Other sensoria frequently performed at the *Makam* (like odours, sounds or tastes illustrated earlier) also usher synaesthetic experiences that invigorate particular sensibilities and dispositions – of which dreams are one accepted manifestation[72]. These need not fit neatly into modes of ethics or religiosity but can be entangled with competing notions of belonging and identity.

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[72] See Tschacher's article for a similar argument made through analysis of Tamil Muslim art and texts (Tschacher, 2013).

Summing Up: Sedimented Sensoria

My ethnography in this chapter attempted to illustrate how sensibilities become sedimented in the person – materializing themselves through a shared and cultivated sensorium. In this regard, both communities discussed here portray certain similarities worth reiterating. The migration histories were in many ways similar and unlike the communities explored in the previous chapter. They were initially less privileged economically and had to endure hardships as a diaspora. The settlements also shared a similar pattern of clustered housing. While the Malabaris were based in rural Johor and the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi in urban Penang, both communities subsequently moved into housing estates and maintain social proximity to a large extent even to this day. There is a specific pull towards Kuala Lumpur for those with particular ambitions, but most of my interlocutors still prefer to stay and live in Johor and Penang. There are also similarities in gender dynamics – both genders were forced to work initially outside the domestic sphere to survive. With upward social mobility among the men after the second half of the 20th century, most of the women in both these communities preferred to be engaged in the domestic sphere, as the income brought home by men was felt to be sufficient. Eventually, Malaysia's socio-economic realities today dictate that both genders are typically expected to seek income-generating employment.

These shifts have also resulted in particular expectations from the state for certain supports and benefits like education, healthcare and housing. This was less so among the family businesses I have encountered, where I have shown how they have traditionally sought financing from within the community. The dynamics of such expectations within the lives of my interlocutors is the subject of the next chapter, where sentiments and sensibilities are spatialized as practices in the domestic domain. A consequence of such expectations from the state among the communities discussed here has been attempts to invoke or demonstrate their loyalty to Islam through the senses, and a subsequent distance from the Indian population. The entanglements

of race and religion in the country heavily dictate the articulations of their sensoria, through which their particular identities were represented. This line of argument will be taken up and explored extensively in chapter six, where the theme is on Islam and aspects of ritual and bureaucratic time.

Chapter V: The Tonalities of Domestic Spaces

Introduction

The last two chapters were ethnographic illustrations of sentiments and sensibilities among Indian Muslims in Malaysia. While space was lurking in the background in these illustrations, this chapter foregrounds the category of space as a dimension of sociality. My use of the term space is distinguished from the more general term "place" that can be territorially demarcated. The boundaries of spaces are comparatively more nebulous. They are not simply the outcome of cultural orders or references, nor do they merely become activated through the imputation of meaning or value to places. Rather, space is conceptualized here as emerging through practices as a "property of social relationships" (Jimenez, 2003, p. 140). They stabilize or shift along with the unfolding of relations, relations being paradigmatic in this conception. The integrity of space thereby is not predicated solely on the situatedness of human experiences abstracted from a person's actions (Munn, 1996). Rather, the abilities of relations to create, uphold and reform spaces also point to their capacities to discipline persons to "signify their experiences in distinctive ways" (Myers, 2002, p. 103). Such capacities to mould spaces as well as be moulded by them imply that relations unfold not in a predesignated space, but spatially. Changing relations thus lead to changing spaces (Jimenez, 2003)[73].

Sentiments and sensibilities are thus spatially grounded in this chapter by exploring them through practices associated with the space that I demarcate as domestic, revolving around overlapping themes of family, household and marriage. These practices provided my interlocutors with frames to articulate particular orders in their domestic spaces, conceptualized here as emerging from structures of relations. Ritual and mundane acts of dwelling become

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[73] While Jiminez is classifying space itself as a capacity, it is unclear how this capacity is linked with other categories like relations or time; specifically, if the latter two are also capacities themselves. My approach in this chapter is to acknowledge the space-making capacity of persons, but predicate it to the analytical focus on emotions and senses.

collective strategies for bringing such spaces under control (Douglas, 1991) and subsequently reinforcing these structures. I explore how they coalesce into an "evaluative regime…that transport structures of meaning, govern formation of subjects and establish frames of communicative reference" (Bens, 2019, p. 97). The chapter ethnographically draws out the multitude of lives and relations that unfold in domestic spaces to explore how they shape personhood. I follow recent anthropological approaches to personhood of going beyond analyses of the functionality of family, household or marriage as institutions. The resurgence of personhood in anthropology as a subject of inquiry from the 1970s is often credited as a reaction to the structuralist erasure of the human in prior analyses of the domestic domain, particularly in the anthropology of kinship. This trend shifted the emphasis from functional explorations of institutions to a more symbolic construction of persons and relations (Carsten, 2004, p. 20; Degnen, 2018, p. 4).

It was typical during ethnography that my interlocutors designated (and self-designated) women as tasked with ordering domestic spaces, as those knowledgeable and skilled in its practices and histories. Such conceptions do not automatically imply the denigration of the domestic, nor does it necessarily have to be contrasted to a masculine public by interlocutors (Strathern M., 1984). The prevalence of this contrast in earlier structural and functional studies of kinship in anthropology has been argued to have led to thinness in the descriptions of the domestic domain, wherein political negotiations are largely absent in the analysis (Yanagisako, 1979, p. 187). Rather, this chapter attempts to characterize the negotiations in the domestic domain of Indian Muslims in Malaysia as having significant political implications concerning a sense of identity. The orderliness of the domestic depended on gendered relations reproduced, mediated and inculcated through such spaces "where comfort, familiarity and intimate sociality occur" (Botticello, 2007, p. 19). But they can simultaneously become spaces of "alienation,

exclusion or instability" (Lenhard & Samanani, 2020, p. 12) when the order or structure of relations become disturbed.

This chapter continues the methodological predilection for boundedness, this time within that of the domestic space. While the porousness of its boundaries is undeniable, this acknowledged boundedness disciplines my narrative of ethnographic immersions in two ways. It allows a better appreciation of the partialities and fissures of these domestic spaces, as well as averting me from making undue holistic claims. The field of relations that sentiments and sensibilities engendered in domestic spaces are ethnographically narrated in this chapter through the themes of familiarity, continuity, ambiguity and rupture. These themes are akin to different melodies that domestic spaces take on as the chapter progresses, providing tonality to emotions and senses in the rhythmic lives of my interlocutors. For classificatory purposes, I refer to the trading communities explored in chapter three as the "sentiment communities" and those explored in chapter four as the "sensibility communities".

Familiarity

The theme of familiarity is explored in this section through the notion of home-making. Home as a subjective space of intimate sociality is often used alongside the notion of house, which can denote both a physical and/or social institution. The fluidity between these terms indicates the inseparability of physical and symbolic aspects of domestic lives. I take up the concept of home-making as a means of analysing this intersection, where "physical enactment" of symbolic relations through care and nourishment enforces and mediates those relations in domestic spaces (Lenhard & Samanani, 2020, p. 3). This section thus explores the familiarities within the domestic spaces of my interlocutors through emotions and senses attached to aspects of housing, dwelling and gender.

Housing

A brief review of the history of the settlement of the different Indian Muslim communities is in order here. As illustrated in chapter three, the migratory patterns of the sentiment communities were highly gendered. The initial migrant male would either stay with relatives or be housed in hostels where single Indian Muslims dwelled until they obtain a firm footing. For the women in India from these communities, the initial migration was usually after marriage to the groom's house. She would live under the care and supervision of the mother-in-law until her husband was in a financial position to build their own house in India or bring her (and their children) over to Malaysia. As for the sensibility communities explored in chapter four, the patterns were that of precarious family migrations with no possibilities foreseen of a return back to India. Not having the same privileges as the other Indian Muslims, they had to initially survive under adverse conditions in Malaysia.

Among the sentiment communities, the male typically migrated to Malaysia in their teenage or early youth initially as single migrants, often having a familial/business connection already in the country. Once the women and children migrate to Malaysia, the houses initially were generally rented by these Indian Muslims. According to Haji Shabeer, the vast majority of men would conceive plans of retiring back to India once the business was successfully handed over to the next kin upon the person reaching the age of sixty or seventy. The investment would thus be directed at building a house back in India, which persists with some of the newer migrants and particularly among the Malabari traders. Haji Ahmed claims that most of them who brought their families over were averse from an Islamic standpoint to bank loans that were often necessary to buy up such property in Malaysia, preferring to pay rental prices rather than loan instalments. This would also make it easier for them to let go of these houses in case the family has to return abruptly to India – perhaps because of business failure, an unforeseen health issue or death. But by the turn of the 21st century, it increasingly became expected back in India for

the immediate family to migrate to Malaysia, as well as conceive of the possibility of permanently settling here. A more "comfortable" life, particularly the Islamic environment, was generally the reason given for such a shift in perception. Families would seek housing in localities already populated by their kin, often taking up adjacent houses.

Housing was significantly different for the sensibility communities. For the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi community, recollections of their dwelling in Penang by the elders were often fraught with narratives of hardship. Mr Qasim relates cases of two or more families having to share a single room in an apartment. The men in such cases would congregate at the clubs mentioned in the previous chapter and only come home to sleep, to provide the women with privacy at home. The beginning of the 1970s saw the shifting of these families to public housing estates, owing to a severe housing shortage in the area (Nasution, 2002, p. 68). These housing estates were based on national programs from 1966 that had reserved quotas for the Malay population. But as Penang had a comparatively fewer Malay population, Indian Muslims from this community were fortunate in obtaining those housing apartments owing to their shared religion. Mr Yacob who still lives in one such housing estate related how it was, and still has, many families from this community.

The Malabari community in Johor is an exception in this urban pattern of Indian Muslim housing in Malaysia. In their initial migration to rural plantation sites, they lived predominantly among other Indian Hindu laborers, having little contact with the urban centres where most of the other Indian Muslims lived. By the mid-1970s, rubber production had drastically reduced, with production gradually going towards palm oil (Abd Aziz, 2012). This coincided with the introduction of land allocation schemes by the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) to the rural population, particularly targeting the Malays who were seen as economically disadvantaged (Mehmet, 1982). Mr Yacob related that a few Malabari families were similarly fortunate in being allocated land in these drafts owing to their shared religion of Islam. Others

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sought affordable housing around the vicinities in Johor, where new industries and employment opportunities were cropping up for men along the Malaysian-Singapore border.

For the sensibility communities, housing loans from banks were more often beyond their financial capacities until the latter decades of the 20th century. By this time, there was a significant upward movement financially owing to better education and qualification among them that allowed them to seek professional or corporate jobs. During my fieldwork, subsequent generations from all the Indian Muslim communities who were born, educated or employed in the country were comparatively more open to the prospect of housing loans from banks. Many conveyed a sense of necessity or being left with no choice but to take up bank loans to own a house. They generally sought dwelling in urban or suburban areas since their employment or businesses were rarely in the rural side. I was also frequently conveyed a preference to dwell in Muslim localities, which would typically be populated by Malays. Although there are numerous pockets in Malaysia housed mostly by the Indian population, interlocutors rarely sought housing in such localities. Yet among Malay neighbourhoods, my interlocutors would frequently distinguish themselves as opting to live as extended families. It is still common to stay in the parental home of the groom after marriage, one that they claim is largely different from their urban Malay counterparts. If the house was not big enough, the tendency was for the whole family to move into a bigger home or take up adjacent houses. This was to accommodate potentially larger families after marriage rather than having the new couple move out. Houses were thus bought or rented with potential plans for the children to raise their families within them as well, either by taking up big houses or having adjacent land or apartment for the children to move into. If an adjacent house or apartment became vacant, many Indian Muslims with big families would attempt to buy or rent those spaces for such considerations.

Dwelling

Mr Asif from the Malabari community initially lived in a big house with his parents and three siblings who were all married. With the marriage of his third and youngest brother and the subsequent arrival of the bride, Asif and his wife felt that the house was becoming congested. Yet, Asif related how he was conflicted in conveying to his mother his intention to move his family to another house. His mother was very emotionally invested in "feeding and nurturing" her grandchildren, and as such, he felt she would take his decision with much sadness. He bought a new newly built house two kilometres away that a friend informed him was available for a bargain price. At first, he disclosed this information to his father but informed his mother that he bought a place for a friend in his name for bureaucratic reasons. He and his wife would then occasionally bring up the possibility of moving into a new house in conversations with his mother, who would shut down the possibility by saying that her grandchildren would not be "raised properly"- particularly indicating that the children would not be fed properly. Once he felt that his decision would not be a complete shock to his mother, Asif sat down with his parents and conveyed his decision to move out to her. While she took the news with sadness, he and his wife made promises of frequently visiting her to mitigate her grief.

Sarah, the eldest among three daughters in a family in Penang, indicated her desire to marry Fahad. While Fahad was from another city, he was employed and living in Penang at that time. Her parents agreed to the marriage with the condition that he would move in with them to their house – to which Fahad and his family did not object. After a year of marriage though, Fahad claimed that he "did not feel at home as a groom" and expressed to her father his desire to move out to a new house. Sarah's family was despondent and implored Sarah to change his mind. But they knew that he was not getting as much privacy as he would like in their house. Coincidently, a house on the same lane was put up for sale and her family agreed with Fahad

to invest together in buying it. When I visited this new house, Sarah's younger sister had married and was sharing the house with them.

Nisha grew up in a house in Selangor that her parents had initially rented but had subsequently bought from the owner. Despite being comparatively small for a family of seven members, they were emotionally attached to the house. Yet when Nisha began approaching the age of marriage, the parents felt that they had to move into a bigger home. They felt that questions would be raised on a family of five children living in a relatively small house – questions over their financial capacity, or perhaps accusations of being stingy. The family thereby bought a newly constructed house, with the possibility of giving it off to Nisha and her prospective groom and returning to the old house after her marriage.

Faisal was from a family engaged in business but was provided with extended education to be the first in the family to seek employment beyond the family business. On obtaining a respectable job in the corporate sector, Faisal relates how he was pressured by his family to immediately invest in a new house. His family was getting a lot of marriage proposals for him, and they felt that owning a house before marriage would engender perceptions of being well-off despite not engaging in business. He thus applied for a housing loan that he was eligible for under his pay scale and moved into a new house upon marriage during my fieldwork. But his Indian Muslim friends expressed to me how he was unnecessarily pressured to invest in a house at such an early stage of his career. They pointed out that he had to travel often as part of his work, during which time his wife would stay over at his parents' house. During such conversations, Mannan complained how many among the "older generation" were still fixated on the notion of a "permanent" house as in India, wherein one lives with an extended family. Shifting houses frequently, he claimed, is seen as projecting an unstable family in his community. In contrast, other urban Malays and Chinese are much more open to the prospect of temporary housing.

The Relations of Gender – The Gender of Relations

There are particular gendered practices among Indian Muslims in Malaysia that were strongly articulated as a mode of familiarity in the domestic space. This is prevalent within households[74] but extends as well to rituals, events and ceremonies beyond the immediate family[75]. Guests visiting houses would typically have the men and women in separate rooms. During my visits to Indian Muslim houses, it was customary for middle-aged or elderly women to stand at the door of the room I would be sitting in and converse, and rarely to sit along with me and other men in the house. I once sought out Mrs Ayishumma, an elderly woman from the Malabari community who was the oldest in her neighbourhood and had a good recollection. Upon arriving at her house, she was perhaps shy at the attention she was being accorded and was initially reluctant to come into the room I and two other men from her community were sitting in. Upon being pressured by her daughter to come forward, she tentatively came to the door and spoke from there. On my insistence that she have a seat, with my protestations at having her stand for so long, she sat by at a corner in the room furthest away from us for the whole hour or more of rich conversation we had. All the while she showed extreme discomfort at sitting along with us and remarked at having been made "to sit like men" while we were bidding our leave.

It was even rare for a woman of my age to present herself when I am in the house unless she was an acquaintance from my earlier university. Having come across a dissertation done on a

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[74] Under Islamic law, interactions between men and women who are not *Mahram* (those with whom marriage is forbidden – parents, siblings, etc) are supposed to be done under certain proprieties – the interpretation of which has historically varied across Muslim communities. More often, it comes down to conditions of modesty with respect to attire and concealing certain parts of the body. Two of my Tamil interlocutors used the term *Gosha* to describe this practice, while most others of an older generation would call it *Purdah* – both having Persian/Urdu origins. Those who grew up in Malaysia and of a younger generation referred to it through the Arabic term *Hijab* that is more commonly used in the country. All of these terms have a reference to a veil or curtain that simultaneously restricts being observed, as well as allude to a space of privacy. In Islamic literature, these terms are not restricted to aspects of gender. Significantly, it is often employed to describe the relationship between God and Humans, wherein God is claimed to be behind a veil.

[75] The practices around rituals will be considered extensively in chapter six, while those of ceremonies will be dealt with in a subsequent section in this chapter.

particular Indian Muslim community at a Malaysian university by an Indian Muslim woman, my consistent attempts at trying to contact her proved futile. Having obtained her contact number, my texted inquiries about possibilities to meet were responded to with a curt sending of the dissertation document and no reply to the meetup. On further inquiring with others in her community, I was finally told by a senior person that she had recently married and would thus not necessarily entertain an unacquainted man to meet her. Among my friends and acquaintances who were married, it was understood that to be invited home or have a conversation at a restaurant would only be along with the husband. In that sense, it was more difficult to meet those who were unmarried, as in that case, the meetings would be within a bigger group of friends.

Such gender relations extended to interactions between the extended kin, particularly between cousins and relatives of the opposite gender after a particular age of puberty. These interactions would typically be at ceremonies and other Indian Muslim social functions where joking, teasing and other restricted intimacies are approvingly enacted. Beyond such social spaces, and particularly at work and educational spaces, I observed and was frequently told of a propensity to avoid such casual intimacies between genders. This propensity would extend to other Indian Muslims they encounter who they think could be potentially acquainted with them, particularly when one is not married. I once encountered an acquaintance at a restaurant who was sitting and conversing with a fellow Indian Muslim woman. Having waived at him from afar, I decided not to interrupt the animated discussion they were having. He texted later that night to "clarify" for me that she was his sister and that I hopefully did not have any "misunderstandings". A similar incident occurred on a train with Farha, an acquaintance to whom I had never directly spoken before. Sitting along with another Indian Muslim man, she immediately beckoned me when she saw me and went on to introduce her brother to imply that there need not be any such misunderstanding. These misunderstandings were generally not "clarified" if it was with the

opposite gender of another ethnicity. Yet for married Indian Muslims, even these interactions with the opposite gender are typically avoided as much as possible. When such interactions become necessary, they would more often be done in settings where there are other persons present.

This is not to deny the subtle differences in such gendered practices between the different Indian Muslim communities. Sana was from a Ramanathapuram family and was born and raised in Malaysia. She related stories of "strict segregation" when she would visit her village in Ramanathapuram, particularly how the houses there would have parking spaces for cars just beside the entrance to the house so that women can pass between the house and car without outsiders seeing them. She married Ahmed who was born in Thanjavur in India but had studied along with Sana in Malaysia. Upon visiting Thanjavur after their marriage, Sana related how the same gender practices persisted "outside" Ahmed's house in public spaces, but was shocked to see how cousins and relatives mingled freely "without hijab" inside the house. While earlier brought up under the impression that Indian Muslims are "conservative" concerning gender interactions compared to the other Malay Muslims, she expressed a certain ambivalence on seeing the "freedom" and "merriment" that Ahmed's kin observed inside the house[76].

The Tongue as a Site of Familiarity

Familiarity was also prominent in the sensations and emotions attached to the tongue. One was through the sedimented tastes of "homely food" in one's tongue that was illustrated among the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi and Malabari communities in chapter four. Although such significances connected to the collective identity may vary, its link to a sense of familiarity in domestic

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[76] This has a lot to do with differences in practice of cross-cousin marriage among different Indian Muslim communities, and shifting attitudes towards it. It is premature at this point in research to make accurate claims about this practice among the different communities, but suffice to say they are comparatively more common among the trading communities from Thanjavur and Ramanathapuram, some of whom claim it primarily as a means of keeping the wealth within the family.

spaces was equally true for all the Indian Muslim communities. Authentic ingredients were sought out in particular stores in the city or brought over from India. As my casual visits to Indian Muslim homes during fieldwork were typically in the evening, it was customary to serve tea and snacks or savouries. I found that the topic of the particular brand of Indian tea they used was a highly productive means for me to initiate conversations with the female interlocutors among the sentiment communities. I would be informed of the store it was bought from, or of how it was brought over from India. Most of them were aware of which brands their acquaintances were using as well. Shazia's mother was quite proud of her particular creativity in mixing two brands of tea powders to make what she claimed was the best tea that her friends were now imitating[77]. Similar invocations of authenticity would be made with other products like rice, spices and other ingredients used frequently.

The gendered performance of reproducing familiarity in the domestic space is perhaps most manifest in the practice of having meals together as a family at home. This was frequently invoked as a differentiating practice from Malays, who were often stereotypically projected as prone to eating outside and not cooking at home[78]. The women among my interlocutors were those entrusted with the task of preparing authentic meals and ensuring the family does not have too much unhealthy outside food. For those families engaged in trade, it was often difficult to get everyone in the family to have a meal together, as the men often did not have fixed routines. Yet even in the discourses of these families, such moments when everyone in the family sits and eats together are considered a valuable and private practice of bonding. Privacy is key here as my presence would be a breach that leads the practice to become gendered – the

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[77] Tea is particularly prominent due to the fact that it is usually made with condensed (tin) milk in Malaysia, while my interlocutors would emphasize that they only have "real" tea at home made with fresh milk.

[78] This is a particularly urban phenomenon, where both genders in most Malay families are employed outside the domestic space. The fact that the majority of women above the age of 30 among my interlocutors had the privilege of devoting their time primarily to the domestic was counteracted by those of the next generation, those currently around the age of thirty or below who were employed.

women of the house never had the meal at the same table at the same time when I was present. An exception was when I had lunch with a couple, both of whom I knew personally before my fieldwork. Yet when I visited the wife's parents along with them subsequently, she abstained like the other women in the house while the men had dinner. In another instance of a get-together of an extended family at a house of an interlocutor where I was seen as less of an intrusion, both the men and women had dinner together. But this time, the dinner was served as a buffet and the men and women sat on opposite sides of the hall where the food was placed. In these instances, the domestic space took a shift due to new relations brought about by my presence as a male outsider.

The spatiality of meals as practice thus takes on relational structures that are highly gendered and based on notions of authenticity. For sure, such familiarities in the domestic space do absorb from its immediate vicinities. Thus, Malay or Chinese ingredients or cuisines can become familiar elements within the domestic spaces. Certain Penang delicacies and savouries like *Nasi Minyak*, *Ketupat* and *Lemang* with *rendang* were frequently consumed among the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi community. The absorption can also extend to the notion of gender. Many of my younger interlocutors would convey that it was becoming customary for their families to occasionally have meals together at a restaurant, wherein they would experiment with different cuisines. Sarah claims that such outings were largely avoided by earlier generations as this portrayed an impression of the women being either sick or lazy to prepare meals at home. Familiarities of the domestic space are being extended in such instances through such intimacies experienced outside the house. When Sarah was abroad for a few months, she craved for Malay cuisines that were served at a buffet only once a week in a restaurant. She forced her family to have their meals there just to "be reminded of home", despite the complaints from them of the quality of the food being bad. The tongue here is thus the "fulcrum" (Lalonde, 1992, p. 77) of the proprieties linked to the practice of meals, but its

spatiality is grounded on multiple layers of emotions and senses linked to the domestic. The sentiments and sensibilities attached to these gendered processes and meaningful events are crucial aspects of cultural familiarity which evokes memories, fosters a sense of belonging and frames collective identities. They are not simply indicative of domestic relations but are suffused by them in these spaces.

Another dimension of familiarity through the tongue is in its capacity for speech, and the particular oral forms of language – often described as the "mother tongue". For sentiment communities, Tamil or Malayalam are the primary language of communication in domestic spaces. While Malay and English are grasped from educational institutions, workspaces and markets, most of them expressed an inability to convey intimacy to their families in these languages. Love, anger, sadness or happiness did not come "naturally", although these can be had with their friends or acquaintances in school or outside the domestic. The fact that many of these families would have one parent who grew up in India and subsequently did not learn Malay during childhood meant that conversations in the domestic space would more often be in Tamil or Malayalam. Many among them strived to learn Malay, while some defiantly did not learn it in order to force the children to speak in the mother tongue. Hamida, a middle-aged woman who arrived in Malaysia after her marriage at the age of twenty, proudly described how she picked up the Malay language by watching Malay serials on television. On asking if she can express love or anger to her children in Malay, she humorously replied that anger only came "fluently" when irritating salesmen contact her over the phone.

For the sensibility communities as shown in chapter four, Malay has now become the primary language of communication within the domestic spaces. Mrs Ghani, a school teacher from the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi community in Penang, described the trajectory of education in her community. Among the initial generations after migration, the children were mostly enrolled at nearby Tamil schools that were only till grade six. By the 1970s parents increasingly began

to educate their children at English and Malay schools on the island. Mrs Ghani relayed how this opened their social interactions with other communities and groups on the island. The social lives of both genders began to be immersed in schools and office spaces where Malay was the primary language of communication. An effect of this, she says with a sense of regret, was the gradual loss of fluency in Tamil, particularly within the domestic space. Yet I found that many were familiar with Tamil, or could understand it to a certain extent. On inquiring this further, almost all them claimed that their grandmothers only spoke Tamil and as such, they would have to be familiar enough to communicate with her. These grandmothers were all from the first two generations of those who migrated. Unlike the male among them, they most often did not have extensive interactions with those outside their domestic spaces – particularly in schools or mosques. This implied that Tamil was more often the only language they could speak with their children. The domestic space as a form of enclosure of femininity here was once described as having a positive consequence of preserving the mother tongue by one such woman. Yet all of them concede that this would no longer continue with the next generation.

Similar dynamics were observed among the Malabari community in Johor. Those fluent in what they consider as their mother tongue of Malayalam were the minority – often the older generation among them. The education of the Malabari children was primarily in Tamil medium schools until the 1980s, because most of the inhabitants within and around the estates were Tamil Hindus. As such, I felt that the utterances in Malayalam among these generations were highly inflected with Tamil words or accents. But during my fieldwork, almost all the Malabari children attended Malay public schools. Malay had gradually become the predominant language used in domestic spaces, and it was only in the *Madrasa* described in chapter four that there was a conscious effort to train the children to speak Malayalam. When attempting to converse with the students in these *Madrasas* in Malayalam, I was initially taken aback by a perceived paternalizing tone employed by these children. They would ask basic

questions like what my name is or where I come from, but in a manner that struck me as patronizing. After encountering this constantly with the students, I inquired with the *Ustads* who replied that this was the characteristic tone they spoke Malayalam in. It later dawned on me that most of these children only heard the language being spoken by the elders in the family – for whom this particular tone was appropriate. In all these cases, familiarity was reproduced through particular practices associated with language within the domestic space.

Continuity

The following section moves along three sites that are connected to the continuity of domestic spaces – that of bounded sociality within associations, the practice of monogamy through arranged marriages, and the performances of ceremonies linked to life cycles. These provide a means of analysing the processes involved in generating and maintaining boundaries that enable certain social relationships while simultaneously disabling others. An example was outlined in chapter three, wherein the sentiment of trust was shown to enable economic transactions between two strangers from the same hometown in India, but close that avenue with those Indian Muslims who are outside such a community. In the same way, certain sensibilities outlined in chapter four allow for particular interactions between Indian Muslims and Malays owing to the shared religion of Islam, but foreclose such interactions between them and other Indians who are not Muslims. Such practices within and between households for the continuity of domestic spaces were observed to be heavily mediated by women. These are, I argue, a particular form of politics among Indian Muslims in the country – one that involves emotions and senses primarily geared towards the maintenance of identities that combine ethnicity and religion. This section thus explores three sites wherein the theme of continuity was linked by my interlocutors to their domestic spaces – bounded sociality, monogamy and ceremonies.

Bounded Sociality

When I began my fieldwork in October 2019, representations of Indian Muslims at the national level were mediated primarily through certain organisations. Some were explicitly engaged in political representation, others had a more social focus, some were based as unions or guilds around specific economic activities and some around Islamic precepts. I was introduced to Mrs Hafiza – an Indian Muslim with extensive experience with many of these organisations. During the first interaction we had during my fieldwork, she lamented a perceived disunity among Indian Muslims that was reflected for her in the inability of any of these organisations to bring all Indian Muslims under one collective banner. One complaint of hers that stuck with me was that most of the Indian Muslims were still more affiliated with their "native place" in India even after permanently having settled in Malaysia. Tamil Muslims would more likely identify themselves with their local city/village of origin (*Ur*) in India, while others would claim to be primarily Malabaris, *Dakhnis* or Urdu Muslims. The internal representations within broader Indian Muslim organisations were thus claimed by her to be unduly influenced by these affiliations. Picking this up, I subsequently made attempts to trace the nature and influence of such affiliations. I gradually became exposed to such locality-based associations that had comparatively more committed membership than the organisations mentioned earlier[79]. These associations would have monthly meetings of the core committee (predominantly men), as well as occasional gatherings where its members would fraternize. There would also be gatherings based around religious rituals like *Selawat*, cultural activities or sports. What was striking for me in conversations with participants in such events was the frequent emphasis on maintaining their "culture" through these gatherings, the gist of which more often came down to their shared domestic practices. The spaces of familiarity illustrated in the previous section were being

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[79] These were diversely termed as *Association*, *Persatuan*, *Jamaath*, *Jema'ah* or Club. But for the sake of brevity, I will collectively refer to them as association as this was the more common term.

sustained by embedding social interactions among persons rooted in, and moulded by, such spaces. It is the unfolding of relations in such interactions geared towards upholding these familiar spaces that this section focuses upon.

The migration of sentiment communities was shown in chapter three to have been spatially patterned. There was, and still is, a tendency for those from a particular locality in India to cluster in particular cities in Malaysia[80]. The sentiment of trust was thus illustrated as spatialized in their business practices, which allowed for easier administration and expansion of the business within and amongst the families. With the flourishing of businesses in a particular city, it was very common to observe the flourishing of larger native associations in such cities. There were formal committees for these associations like the other broader Indian Muslim associations in the country. But unlike the latter, these groups were primarily concerned with the welfare of those belonging to their locality in India. This were through maintaining a database of fellow natives in Malaysia to provide them with welfare and support; as well as undertaking charity, investment and remittances back in India. Mr Ali described a healthy competition that his native association had with diasporas in other countries towards charity work in their native locality in India. The association also provided an avenue for the businesses to flourish, which Haji Shabeer described as both "internal or external". The former for him involved activities between the members, particularly through providing networks of trust, credit and reconciliation. The latter involved attempts to build relations of influence with bureaucratic and government officials in a particular city or networks of potential employees in India – both of which provide crucial support for the business. One association was accused by an interlocutor of acting as a labour recruitment agency by attempting to monopolize the contracting of migrant restaurant employees. They apparently did this by pooling up potential

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[80] During my fieldwork, there was a tendency for those from Panaikulam to prefer Penang, those from Irumeni increasingly concentrated in Ipoh, Alagankulam in Kuala Lumpur; while those from Vani and Kasargod in Johor.

employees from India and tightening links they had within the Malaysian bureaucracy. Through such attempts, restaurant owners I interacted with frequently expressed intent to monopolize a particular city through these associations, or even seek new cities to expand into.

The intimate ties of spatiality between the economic and domestic (alluded to already in chapter three) thus affect the process of home-making when the immediate family of a person within this community migrates to Malaysia. The family subsequently would socialize primarily through the links within these associations, and frequently meet each other at their homes. New women in particular are guided into the settling process into the new country by other women in the association – who would more often be sisters, cousins or close relatives. For many of these associations, the membership consisted predominantly of families who have permanently settled in Malaysia. Most associations only provided full membership to those who are either Malaysian citizens or have obtained permanent residency permits in the country[81]. There are annual gatherings of their members throughout the country that are highly anticipated and planned. I attended two such annual national gatherings before the pandemic – those of the towns of Panaikulam and Alayankulam in Tamil Nadu. Both these gatherings were attended by well over a thousand persons, including some who had come from abroad simply to attend. It was mentioned on stage during one of these gatherings that there were possibly more people at the event than currently in the town back in India. During both events, the leaders of other such Indian Muslim native associations in Malaysia were invited and honoured on stage with a wreath of a shawl. Cultural references were replete and conspicuous. Most senior women wore the traditional *Saree* that is rarely worn by Indian Muslim women in Malaysia[82]. Tamil

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[81] Full membership included voting rights as well as eligibility to be elected into the committee. Citizenship was far more common among the Tamil Muslims and less so among those from Kerala, the latter still preferred to keep their families in India during my fieldwork.

[82] The *Saree* is a dress that is highly charged among Indian Muslims in Malaysia due to its popular association to Indian Hindu women. Although it is a traditional clothing worn in India by women of all religions, the fact that one side of the hip is typically exposed is often projected as un-Islamic by most Muslims in the country, including Indian Muslims.

Muslim songs of Nagoor Haniffa, a legendary singer from Tamil Nadu were sung on stage by men and children. During an indoor football match organized for the men during this gathering, one team took the tongue-in-cheek decision to wear the *Lungi*, a cotton piece of cloth that is traditionally wrapped around the waist and legs inside the house and particularly as a night dress. Even for such large gatherings, almost all of them seemed to be familiar with each other. Most of them would have kin relations with each other – either relations of blood or of affinity. This was brought out to me starkly during the first gathering I attended when I noticed being frequently pointed at and given curious (but polite) looks. On mentioning it to an acquaintance at the event, he chuckled and explained that they were trying to guess who I was "related to" since they did not recognize me. I stood out because I was casually wandering around observing everything, and not fraternizing with anyone like everyone else. He subsequently told me that a few persons had inquired about me and he had to explain to them that I was simply a visitor and was not from the native locality.

The socializing among the sensibility communities, touched upon in chapter four, was shown to have been influenced by their settlement pattern. The Malabaris were heavily concentrated around former rubber estates in Johor, while the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi community was based in urban Penang. For both these communities, physical proximity allowed for the flourishing of associations that played an active role in their social lives. For the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi community, these were also referred to as clubs, which had designated premises in the city and organised events and activities for its members[83]. Among the Malabaris, the social circles were highly influenced by the presence of *Madrasas* in each of these estate settlements. Almost all of these *Madrasas* before the pandemic had weekly *Selawat* gatherings. These were attended by most of the men and women, as well as all the children enrolled in the *Madrasa*. Each of

[83] Although my immersion among the social lives of the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi community was comparatively less, each family I interacted with was aware of which club they or their parents were affiliated with. The functions of these clubs were indicated in chapter four.

these estates also had its own *Jema'ah* that looked after the affairs of the *Madrasa*, dealt with the concerns of its Malabari members, took up charity works and organised social events among them[84]. Although the vitality of each of these Jama'ah differed, they were almost unanimously claimed by my interlocutors as the prime locus of their social lives. Parents frequently articulated their intentions of confining the sociality of their children within these circles – primarily through enrolling them in the *Madrasa*. An umbrella organisation 'Jemaah Malabar Muslim Negeri Johor' (JMMNJ) attempts to bring all these Malabari estate associations under one banner. A major event under this umbrella was the annual *Madrasa* competition wherein the students under each *Madrasa* competed amongst themselves in songs, quizzes, recitations and elocution. One such gathering I attended at Sungai Tiram before my fieldwork in 2013 had a huge attendance numbering well over a thousand, with the entire street being cordoned off and managed by the police for this event.

Beyond these, some social groups were not based around such native localities or migrant clusters. There were a few interlocutors who were members of certain *Sufi Tariqas* or Indian Muslim Islamic movements that maintained a certain level of sociality among themselves. The Tabligh Jamaat movement was popular among the men of the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi community and played an influential role in their family lives. There was also a *Selawat* group that consisted of highly educated and well-off Indian Muslim personalities in Kuala Lumpur that I came across. This group has been gathering for more than twenty years on Sunday mornings at one of the houses to recite a particular *Selawat*. While initially, it used to be a family affair, it later became a men-only gathering. As most were above the age of fifty, they claimed that it became difficult to coordinate with their families who lived away from them. There were also certain female-centric Indian Muslim organisations. Mrs Najiya described her

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[84] There were ten such clusters in Johor – Ulu Tiram, Masai, Kluang, Kota Tinggi, Sungai Tiram, Cha'a, Simpang Rengam, Senai, Paloh and Kempas.

involvement in events and activities conducted in her city in collaboration with Indian Muslim associations. Mrs Rafiya narrated her particular introduction of annual tea parties for women, where a large hall would be booked and invitations sent to Indian Muslim women in Kuala Lumpur.

Arranged Monogamy

Marriage was a defining aspect of culture for my interlocutors, based on a particular notion of monogamy through arranged marriages. This was always expressed in reference to Malays, who were often projected as having comparatively lesser stable marriages due to an ostensible prevalence of polygamy and divorce. This would be juxtaposed with a general sense of commitment and investment towards the family that Indian Muslims are imbibed with in their domestic spaces. This involved particular gender practices outlined in the previous section, the confinement of sociality within the community circles outlined earlier in this section, and the entanglement of business investments with arranged marriages among the sentiment communities illustrated in chapter three. All of these were also subsequently linked to the continuity of their domestic spaces. Marriage would thus be devoted considerable planning by the family; one that involved the type of house they lived in as shown in the previous section, the type of families the children socialize with as shown earlier, as well as the inculcation of the obligations to sustain the marriage through sentiments and sensibilities.

Anthropology has a rich tradition for the analysis of marriage, often under the rubric of kinship. For long under the thrall of Victorian ideals of domesticity, much of the initial literature stressed the primacy of marriage in sustaining traditional structures of obligations in colonial societies. It is not the regulative functions of marriage, nor the structural significance of kinship that this section explores. Rather, the focus is on expanding upon the sentiments and sensibilities through experiences, conceptions and processes of marriage articulated by my interlocutors. The emotions and senses employed towards the continuity of domestic spaces

are examined through the manifold relations of monogamy upheld by Indian Muslim families that were brought forth in my ethnography.

Among my Indian Muslim interlocutors, there is an overriding preference among families to find suitable spouses for the offspring, rather than placing the burden of choice on them. Even if a person expresses their desire to marry another Indian Muslim, there would be a performative attempt by the families to bring the choice under their purview. For the sentiment communities, it was very common until the beginning of the 21st century for an Indian Muslim person who grew up in Malaysia to be engaged to a spouse from India, with an explicit intention of preserving their Indian Muslim culture in the domestic space through this practice. Continuity here is being conceived through the presence of at least one person in the domestic space who is perceived as being imbibed in their cultural values and untainted by those grasped from the Malaysian environment. Although this practice of arranging a spouse in India has decreased significantly, there were still many marriages during my fieldwork itself that was under this setting. Most of these choices were by the families, with the persons involved typically having a final word of consent.

Shamsiya was born into an extended family in Penang and grew up in the country. Upon finishing high school, she expressed her desire to continue with a bachelor's education in Kuala Lumpur. Her family agreed on the condition that she would marry a spouse of their choice by the time she finishes her four-year-long graduation. A distant cousin in India was put forward by those from her extended family to her parents as a potential spouse, which they found suitable and subsequently got her to consent to. Having three children when I met Shamsiya and her husband, she described her upbringing among her extended family where cousin marriages were preferred as a means of keeping the wealth from the business within the family. Her parents were similarly married off – her father had grown up in Malaysia and was paired with her mother who had grown up in India. As such, she knew from childhood that she would

likely be married to a cousin from India and credited this practice for keeping her family rooted in their culture. She had never met her husband before marriage but knew about him. As I felt uncomfortable asking her if she was happy with how her marriage has turned out, I rather tentatively asked if her daughter would likewise be paired with her cousin. She replied that it would be what she prefers for her daughter but has concerns over whether her daughter's upbringing in Malaysia would make her reluctant. "It's different now", she confided, "when I was growing up in Malaysia, our social circle was mostly limited to our community. Now my children interact with Malays and Chinese and so you cannot tell how she will feel about it when she is older. To marry a cousin is one thing, to marry someone from India is another". Both were being taken to be stigmas by those who grow up unfamiliarised with them.

While Shamsiya consented to a proposal from India put forth by her family, others may request such a match. Rayyan was born in Malaysia into a family that was involved in a restaurant business in Kuala Lumpur but was sent to India around the age of ten for his education. Apart from yearly visits to Malaysia during his school vacations, he only returned to the country after high school for his bachelor's education. He subsequently went on to obtain good employment in the corporate sector and his parents began receiving marriage proposals for him from other Indian Muslim families. Rayyan specifically expressed his preference to his parents for his spouse to be someone who was born and brought up in India. His mother rather wanted him to marry someone based in Malaysia to avoid the bureaucratic hassles of an international marriage that she as an Indian citizen had to go through in the country. Rayyan was adamant though that he would be more comfortable with a person who grew up in India, and that he felt that this was necessary to maintain their traditions and culture in their domestic spaces. Ultimately his desire prevailed and he became engaged to a person from his native city in India.

The choice of the spouse by the family from the sentiment community was shown in chapter three to be intimately tied to the business if the family is still engaged in it. The suitability of

the spouse here typically depends upon the type and level of business of the families, as well as the mutual networks they are connected to. One particular family business that was aggressively expanding its chain of restaurants during my fieldwork was described by a person within the family as more concerned with whom the male members of the family marry. This was supposedly so because they wanted the men in the family to remain in the business and not seek sustenance beyond it. As such, the men would be matched with those who are within the extended family connected to the business, or with those families that cannot potentially provide the groom with opportunities outside their business. It was also common in such cases to arrange a match very early during one's teenage and then subsequently marry them off once they both attained maturity. For the women in these families, preference was given to a groom who was trustworthy for potentially entering their business, or with families that are willing to co-invest in the business through the trust provided by the marriage. The continuity of the domestic spaces in such cases was intimately tied to the economic, specifically by financially sustaining these spaces through the business.

This can differ when the family is no longer involved in business, or if the persons in question are employed outside it – as was the case among the vast majority of the sensibility communities. These arrangements depended largely upon the educational qualifications of both persons but were still typically preferred among the family networks. Mrs Rashida, a Malabari woman in her fifties, had an engaging conversation with me about marital choices in her community. She had gone to a nearby high school until the age of 16 and was informed by her parents that they wished to find a suitable spouse for her. The decision over her marriage was taken by her parents, who decided to marry her to a person from the same estate in Johor after deliberating over it with the elders in her community. She and her husband were shown a photograph of each other after the arrangement, and subsequently met each other on the day of the wedding. Her first daughter was likewise arranged to a Malabari person from another estate

in Johor but was given the chance of meeting her potential spouse once before agreeing to the marriage. He came over with his parents to her house and interacted with her before both of them gave their approval. By the time the second daughter of Mr Rashida came of age, the family found it difficult to find a suitable spouse – all potential men or their families were not to their satisfaction. She was subsequently allowed to continue her education at a nearby university until a satisfactory arrangement was reached. As time went on, Mrs Rashida began telling her to look for potential Malabari spouses in her university as it was difficult to find many Malabari men who were educated at that time. "I told her as long as he has a large nose, we will agree to her choice", Mrs Rashida claimed. Upon expressing my confusion about the reference to the nose, she clarified that Malabaris tended to have larger noses than Malays or Chinese among them in Johor. She claimed to have convinced her daughter that only Malabari men can provide a "stable" way of life that they are adjusted to – a strong commitment to a monogamous union, loyalty to the community and an upholding of their traditions within the domestic space.

Similar sensibilities were expressed by Rahman through an anecdote confided to me of an infatuation he had with a Malay woman during his late teens. While he had concealed it from his family, his brother came to know of it and informed the family about it in his presence. A tense moment ensued between the brothers but his mother intervened and demanded everyone leave Rahman to his own. She firmly claimed that if Rahman wishes to move away from the family, they might as well treat him well until he leaves[85]. This deeply struck Rahman and momentarily brought tension down among the family. His uncles and aunts in subsequent days talked with him about what he would miss if he married outside the community – particularly

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[85] Rahman commented here that marrying a Malay woman was apparently tantamount to leaving the family, as she would not be able to adjust to their way of life and pull him away from them.

the support that came with the obligations towards the family and community. Ultimately, this swayed him to give up on his love affair and was coupled two years later to a Malabari woman.

In many ways, women were more engaged in the process of "matchmaking" – as it was frequently referred to by them. Men often feigned ignorance over its intricacies when I asked about it. Most women were intimately aware of who in their community is married amongst them and who is yet to be married. They were also claimed as the ones aware of the procedures involved in a proposal – how it has to be initiated, who has to be approached, and what needs to be discussed and negotiated. In some instances, there are intricate negotiations over the exchange of bridewealth and/or dowry – particularly when the proposal is between family businesses. Khalida described such an event between family X, which had several reputable businesses in the country, and family Y which was comparatively less established. Family X was interested in arranging an engagement of their son to Family Y's daughter. This was initiated through a surprise visit by members of the former to the latter's house. As such, the father in family Y was unprepared over how to negotiate with the guests, although it was much more in the interest of his family to have the proposal go forward. After exchanging niceties and listening to the proposal, he tentatively suggested that he will think about it with his extended family and let them know about their decision soon. The mother who was inside another room all along, sensed a disappointment in the faces of the guests as they subsequently took leave. Having hurriedly inquired with her husband over what had gone along, she immediately ran outside to the front porch where the guests were about to enter their car. She declared that her family was very much willing to go ahead with the proposal and would agree to any of their terms – including contributing a new house for the couple. She expressed her hope that they forgive the misunderstanding from her husband's side for not agreeing earlier. The anecdote was illustratively conveyed to me by Khalida as an instance of how men are often ignorant of the intricacies of such negotiations.

The growth of associations laid out earlier allowed for such matchmaking to flourish amongst them. There were often informal matchmakers (more often women) who provided information regarding potential spouses, and guidance over how the proposal has to be carried out. During a conversation with the president of one such association over marriage among Indian Muslims, he informed me that his wife was the "unofficial matchmaker" among them – humorously observing that she follows the marriage scene in their community like a financial broker follows the stock market. Most of the members in his association and others in their family networks would inquire with her about a suitable spouse for their son or daughter. She would try to link these families and arrange the negotiations between them, often attending such meetings between the families as a mediator. During another conversation where I tried to bring up the topic of marriage, I was introduced to Mrs Rasiya as a prominent matchmaker within her community. Mrs Rasiya detested the term "broker" that was commonly used in India, as for her it referred to a person who seeks remuneration for the service of arranging spouses. Rather she and the other matchmakers amongst them did this out of their passion for the community and particularly for "*Rizqi*" – seeking reward from Allah as a good deed. Such informal services require highly connected and intimate networks, which the flourishing of associations provided. She also went on to claim that it required a high level of patience and diplomacy – a "skill" that many of her friends lacked. Many of them would try to be a matchmaker but would give up after a few attempts out of frustration.

While families earlier tended to look for spouses within their familial networks, it was now becoming common for these matchmakers to widen the scope by broadening the networks of Indian Muslims throughout the country. Mrs Rasiya claimed that as families increasingly began to settle in Malaysia, there came about a gradual preference for an Indian Muslim spouse who was also based in the country. A consequence was that it was becoming more difficult to find matches of appropriate age and suitability in comparison to the much larger pool back in India.

This led to the acceptance of certain internal groups among Indian Muslims that were previously avoided. For instance, Panaikulam and Alagankulam are two cities in the state of Tamil Nadu that possibly has the largest representation of Indian Muslims in Malaysia. Mrs Najmiya revealed that it was a common belief earlier among the Muslims in these cities that a match between two persons from these cities would result in a bad marriage[86]. This has now become a tale of "superstition of older times", she says, and there has been a considerable number of arrangements between these families she knows of[87]. It was also extremely rare earlier for families from the sentiment communities to accept persons from the sensibility communities into their family, often looking down upon the latter as having assimilated too much of Malay culture into their lives. This has also slightly shifted, with a few among the sentiment community I interacted with expressing a sense of respect for precisely having assimilated well into the country yet still maintaining a sense of being Indian Muslim[88].

Ceremony

With the continuity of domestic spaces among Indian Muslims being linked to bounded sociality and monogamous endogamy, one crucial site where this became expressed was ceremonies connected to a person's life course. These ceremonies involved traditions attached to birth, circumcision, puberty, marriage and death observed during fieldwork. Victor Turner remarked that while "ritual is transformative, ceremony is confirmatory" (Turner 1986, 95). Ceremonies in this sense were articulated by some as periodically affirming their sense of commitment to the family and belonging to the community. Apart from weddings, most of these ceremonies were attended by those within the networks of the extended family and often

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[86] Muslims of Panaikulam has traditionally followed the Shafii school of Islamic law while those of Alagankulam followed the Hanafi school – with certain differences in the intricacies of daily practices like prayer and diet. Mrs Najmiya claims that this could have been a factor beyond provincial rivalries or former caste histories.
[87] But some nonetheless bring it up as "traditional wisdom" when such marriages do go wrong, she claimed.
[88] It was also pointed out in the previous chapter that the employment of women from the sensibility communities beyond the domestic spaces was earlier looked down upon by those from the sentiment communities, but again this perception had largely shifted during my fieldwork which will be examined later.

became an extension of their domestic spaces. I would often quickly be identified as an outsider in these settings, but not necessarily as an intruder. Most of them would make it a point of emphasising to me their attachment to "our" shared Indian Muslim culture through these ceremonies.

Ceremonies connected to birth were typically associated with happiness. Pregnancy is first revealed to the mothers of the couple, who pass the information on to others in their networks. For some among the sentiment communities, there are traditions whereby the women in the community get together at the house of the pregnant person after her third month and gift her with bangles on her hands. This is said to accustom the foetus to the sound of them clinking and associate it with the mother, thereby stimulating affection for her. The birth of a child often occasioned a naming ceremony that was attended by the immediate family. This was often followed by a ceremony on the fortieth day after pregnancy when the hair of the child was shaved and an animal sacrifice was performed. This was usually attended by the extended family, and the slaughtered meat was feasted upon. The circumcision of a masculine child was done within his fifth or sixth year. For some communities, it was a family affair that did not warrant a large ceremony. Most even claimed to have circumcised their child at the hospital within the first year of birth without any fuss. But there were some among the sentiment communities that arranged large ceremonial gatherings for the occasion. One family informed me that they attempted to rent an elephant to parade their first-born son, but "unfortunately" had to settle for a horse. On all these occasions, the immediate or extended families were intimately involved in gathering and planning for the event.

Wedding ceremonies were the prime event that families looked up to and where I would primarily be invited for as their cultural domestic spaces that an outsider can grab glimpses of. These weddings were often admitted by my interlocutors as extravagant and underwent considerable planning and preparation by the family. Saving up years prior to these events was

shown in chapter three to be inculcated among the sentiment communities, but the same applied to the sensibility communities as well. The men more often decided the venue – either at home if it is large enough to accommodate the guests, or at an event hall that is often booked months in advance. The groom was also more often given the freedom to choose his attire – typically a suit but increasingly the *Baju Melayu*, a traditional Malay attire. Besides these, most of the planning and preparation were done by the women in the family. These involved decisions over the families that have to be invited, the food choices for the event, decorations at the venue and the costumes that the bride has to wear. The choices of bridewealth and/or dowry were also typically done by the women. These were more often negotiated between the women of each family after the marriage has been arranged between them. During my fieldwork, the Malay practice of gift exchanges called *Hantaran* was increasingly being adopted by Indian Muslims, whereby a particular number of gifts is exchanged between the bride and groom on the wedding day.

The wedding ceremony can last from a single day to one that extends for two or three days. Before the main event and in the days prior, the immediate family of the bride and groom would assemble at their respective houses. After the event as well, and on the night after the ceremony, the extended family would again gather at the houses for the celebration. For the main event to which all the guests are invited, a large hall is typically booked in the city. These guests include the extended family, those within the community networks and other friends and acquaintances of the families. There can alternatively be two separate functions conducted by each family separately if the combined number of guests exceeds a manageable capacity. Among the sentiment communities, weddings were also one of the few events where some of the women wear their traditional *Saree* in Malaysia. Mr Raheem had invited his Malay colleagues from his office to his son's wedding which was attended by his relatives from India and Malaysia. Subsequently, his Malay colleagues all remarked in passing to him that he seemed to have a

lot of *Hindu* friends – of which he could only recall a handful that had attended. Upon inquiring further with them, they seemed to mistake the women wearing *Saree* to be *Hindus*. Such impressions were given as a reason by most of my younger female interlocutors to avoid wearing it altogether in the country. But for those coming from India or those of an older generation, many would defiantly wear the *Saree* for the occasion.

It was indicated earlier that these wedding ceremonies were often spaces where gender interactions among Indian Muslims became more relaxed. Cousins and relatives of the opposite gender who usually avoid interactions can exchange pleasantries and jokes in these spaces. As such, Mrs Farha mentioned that weddings were also becoming a major site for courting. Through texting or online messaging, two persons interested in each other would secretly agree to meet face-to-face at an upcoming wedding. Those braver would try to introduce to their parents the person they are interested in at these events. Parents would also engage in their own activities, whereby two families would try to introduce the children they wish to pair to each other here. Mrs Rasiya also informed me that weddings were the prime site where she was on the "lookout" for potential spouses to matchmake. As such, it was typical for parents of marriageable children to pressure them to present themselves particularly well at these weddings. Some of the bachelors would avoid these events precisely to side-step such matchmaking by their families.

Finally, ceremonies attached to death were those that had no joy or happiness. The immediate family would all congregate upon the death of a person and others would subsequently visit the house to pass their condolences. In contrast to the requirement of presenting oneself well at weddings stated earlier, family members should not be too concerned with their appearances at these ceremonies. During one such event I attended, a person critically remarked to me that the son of the deceased seemed to have had a good shave and trim of his facial hair in the morning. This was to imply that he does not seem to have been too affected by the death of his

father. The funeral is mostly a masculine affair, with prayers led by a close relative done at a mosque and the body subsequently buried at a cemetery. The attendees would then be invited home for prayers and recitation of *Surah Yasin*. It is often upon the extended family to feed the bereaved and the guests at the house, which would be coordinated and arranged for by them. This bereavement would be continued periodically – crucially on the fortieth day of passing and subsequently every year of the date of passing, wherein prayers would be extended to their soul by the relatives. The continual remembrance of the deceased through such performances was taken to express their connection to the family. Mrs Amina from Johor had passed away more than twenty years prior to my fieldwork, but her husband and children all assembled every Friday after the noon prayer at her grave to recite *Surah Yasin* and pray for her wellness in the afterlife. One of her sons, Mr Ali, subsequently mentioned to me his gnawing sense of guilt whenever he is out of Johor on Fridays and cannot attend this event. He mentions this as the only reason he has not moved out of Johor despite having opportunities to do so. He also expressed his desire to raise his children with the same sense of connection to himself and his wife.

Ambiguity

The previous two sections illustrated the unfolding relations of familiarity and continuity in domestic spaces of Indian Muslims during my fieldwork. The narrative in these illustrations often took on the genre or element of comedic processes. Contentment with the status quo and marriages as happy endings were prominent tropes employed in the articulations of my interlocutors, and subsequently in my ethnographic writing. The next two sections attempt to destabilize this trope by bringing out the themes of ambiguity and rupture observed during my fieldwork. This section attempts to spatialize some of the manifold articulations of ambiguity within the domestic lives of my interlocutors. In particular, it tries to bring out the conflict

between notions of duty and desire that a person can be confronted with in domestic relations. The section is divided into three parts of labour, parenthood and affinity as the sites where ambiguity in domestic life was prominently expressed[89].

Labour

Among the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi community in Penang, the initial migrant women were shown in chapter four to have a history of engaging in the grinding and trading of spices. This was often taken by other Indian Muslims from the sentiment communities to be a sign of their destitution. Yet Mr Qasim claims that by the 1970s, their community gradually began to realize the opportunities that being a Muslim in Malaysia provided them. Government jobs that had quotas for Malays/Muslims became an attractive proposition that stimulated furthering the children's education - including that of girls. Thus, many of them I encountered were employed in such public positions as bureaucrats, teachers or medical staff. As for the Malabaris who had migrated to rubber estates in Johor, both genders had to initially toil in the rubber fields. With the closure of these rubber plantations after the 1970s, most men sought labour in the growing industry along the Singapore border which was only an hour away. But many also took up taxi driving as a vocation, as the rules at that time allowed 16-year-olds to obtain driving permits. This was seen by many as comparatively less intensive work that required little qualification. Mr Yacob also claims that there was a certain appeal of driving a car among the youth, and I encountered many Malabari men in their middle ages who still drive taxis for a living. Halimatha relates that there was a shift during this time in women opting to become engaged at home, as the earnings that men earned from work outside the estate were seen as sufficient

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[89] Beyond these, sexuality is a vital component of ambiguity in domestic relations, but often requires high level of trust developed over a considerable period of time for its disclosure. While it is an intense manifestation of emotions and senses, it was a topic that was difficult to discuss or disclose for me and my interlocutors and was unfortunately rarely breached in our interactions. This by itself is a revealing aspect of personhood (including mine), but requires further ethnographic data than that accumulated during my fieldwork for any sort of generalization.

to sustain a family compared to an earlier life in the plantations. She relates a sense of liberation in this choice from the earlier prospect of hard work in the rubber fields.

Yet during the time of my fieldwork, most of the Indian Muslim women in their youth were equally, if not more, educated than the men of the same age group. For one, the men among the sentiment communities were often ushered into the family business after their high schooling or graduation. I was also frequently told by men that previous work experiences were usually worth more than additional educational qualifications for most job profiles or businesses in the country. As such, men often preferred to enter a business or a suitable job as soon as possible rather than seek extensive education. On the other hand, women often conveyed to me that their choice of higher education was also a means of delaying their marriage and thus would pressure their families to enrol them at universities and colleges. Yet with the frequent complaints of rising costs of living conditions in the country during my time, it often became necessary for women in Indian Muslim households to seek employment outside their domestic spaces and garner additional income for the family. It is to the ambiguities that this scenario brought about in gender relations among Indian Muslims that this section now turns to.

The duty or desire of being economically sufficient was generally gendered among my interlocutors. It is typically expected from the male as an obligation towards his family, whereas it was rather expressed as a desire on the part of the female. Shahul and Hamida were engaged to each other, before which he had agreed to her desire to seek employment outside their domestic space. In the initial three years of marriage, both of them were earning substantially well for them to decide to buy a house in the city through a bank loan. When she subsequently became pregnant with their first child, she described her exposure to the "ruthless" side of Malaysian corporate life that provided little support for pregnant women. She came to know that she was only allowed to take maternity leave when her "water breaks", or

only upon any complications with the pregnancy. All the while her family kept dissuading her from continuing with the job and complained of not being able to provide her with the traditional support that women in her community are supposed to be given during pregnancy. Gradually she described a change in her desire after the birth of their child and a shift towards the duty that she felt towards her family. Yet the house they had bought had pending payments on the loan they had taken, and she subsequently had to continue working for seven more years. Upon quitting her job to focus exclusively on the domestic domain, a major regret she described was her inability to raise her children at home like she was raised. She also described how she dissuaded her sister from being employed after the latter gave birth to her first child. Yet for men who were born into family businesses, it was shown in chapter three how desires can be towards breaking out of the duty towards business; or a return back into the business can be for a desire to be financially independent.

Mrs Zakiah was a middle-aged Indian Muslim who was born and brought up in Johor. Among her community, opportunities for extended education became economically feasible only after the 1980s, but she relates how it was generally frowned upon until recently for women to opt for education over marriage and "family life". She was adamant though and became the first person from the community to attain a doctorate and subsequently a university professorship. For a long while though, her family was unable to find a suitable spouse for her, as her educational qualifications did not match with the men from her community. While she eventually married an Indian Muslim man outside her community after the age of forty, she related to me their collective decision of not having any offspring. Yet she also described the advice she often gives her nieces against delaying marriage and against perceiving it as a hindrance to education. On the other hand, desires can be in the other direction. Nisha was provided extensive education abroad by her family to obtain a "secure government job" in Penang. After her return though, she declared a desire to set up her enterprise of selling curry

powders, which her family did not find appealing. "Business is not for our community, and particularly for women" she was told. Upon her marriage though, her husband began to motivate her to take it up and she was engaged in its running during my fieldwork.

Parenthood

With both parents of a household working outside the domestic domain being the norm among Indian Muslims, grandparenting increasingly became a common topic of discussion with my interlocutors. It was common for parents to leave their infants and toddlers under the care of their grandparents. For one, placing them at preschools or hiring a private maid was said to be expensive. Secondly, most grandparents cherished the opportunity while the parents had more trust in them than others. A key spatial element that emerged here was that such families often would prefer to live with or in proximity to their parents. Yet when the families begin to get larger, the burden on grandparents also can at times become unmanageable. Mr Haris had five children who had all married and had children of their own. Four of them lived in the same city and all of these couples were employed during the daytime. As such, two grandchildren are dropped off at his house in the morning by their parents, while another granddaughter is picked up by him from her house and dropped off at her school. Another grandson is sometimes picked up by him to the house on the way back if the parents request him to. This implied that they often took care of four grandchildren during the day. On relating these events to me, Mr Haris exclaimed that his daughters and daughters-in-law never seemed to appreciate the burden he and his wife takes up and that they seem to be exploiting the generosity of his wife in never declining their requests. Mrs Haris, who had been quietly listening to our conversation, opined that it was the fault of being "educated". Mr Haris had insisted that all of his children should have a good education and had financed it despite her reluctance, particularly over that of the daughters. When the time for their marriage came about, they were thus "naturally" paired with Indian Muslim spouses who were equally or more educated. For Mrs Haris, this implied that

both the couple would desire to be employed and earning, with little regard for how children have to be raised or nurtured. She could not bear to think of the possible neglect that her grandchildren could have under private maids or childcare centres, and had thus agreed to take them under her care.

Beyond the aspect of care, the burden of marrying their children was also a topic where ambiguity was frequently expressed. Considerable savings had to be allocated for the marriage of one's offspring, which includes the wedding ceremony, marital exchanges between families, as well as wealth that is often passed on to the marrying person by their family. When these tie in with the expenses of educating the children beyond their schooling, families might compromise on either education or marital exchanges. Yet this could imply a less suitable match for their children in either case. Faheema vividly described an intense and long-drawn argument she had with her mother as she was approaching the end of her schooling. She was adamant about continuing her education like her friends, but her family felt they were not in a position to financially support it. For one, her father was against bank loans from an Islamic standpoint that she was eligible for. Her mother, on the other hand, had been saving up for her marriage through the jewellery that she had planned to pass on to her daughter. As the issue kept dragging on, Faheema's father decided one day to reconcile it. He called upon Faheema and her mother and had a long talk over familial unity. He then placed some jewellery on a table and placed the choice between education or marriage with Faheema, going on to explain his take on the repercussions of each choice. Overwhelmed by the situation, she was unable to make a choice and ended up crying. Her mother was similarly moved by the event and subsequently decided the next day to allow Faheema to pursue her wish.

Affinity

The previous two discussions of ambiguity were often described as unique experiences of Indian Muslims within the Malaysian context of education and employment. Beyond these,

there were moments whereby a deeper discussion of affinity among the family would reveal its ambiguities. In interactions with both men and women who were in their middle age, stability was always the keyword attached to a functional underpinning to parenting and gender. It was the primary duty of the male/father to provide economic stability for the family and household, while that of the woman/mother is to labour towards emotional stability. Neither are incommensurate though, as deeper conversations would reveal how each overlaps in subtle ways with the other for both economic and emotional fulfilment. The economic obligations of the male are supposed to be provided through particular 'masculine' sentiments of strength and assurance, as well as through an ability to reign in excessive emotions. This was particularly evident in perceptions of parental roles among them. The children are raised at home to have an emotional distance from their fathers through particular practices that are meant to convey the sentiment of respect. Many of my interlocutors recall how they were not supposed to sit in the same room the father would be in or protrude a sense of being "laid back" in his presence. Intense emotions of glee, grief or anger are traditionally not expressed in front of him by the children. These are rather conveyed to the mother, with whom it is emotionally much more relaxed. Personal choices, opinions or emotions are thus typically expressed to the mother, who would convey them to the father at an appropriate time and place. The affinity between the father and mother was also supposed to be reserved in the presence of others, whereby affection has to be expressed privately between them.

This is not to deny the prevalence of exceptions, but that exceptions validate the rule. Amina was keen to point out how her father was "open" and "free" compared to other Indian Muslim fathers, where his emotional attachment to his children was often remarked upon by others in his community. Similarly, Mrs Ayishumma (mentioned in the earlier section) recounted how she saved money that her husband brought home to buy their family a house, which involved intense bargaining with a Chinese landlord. While narrating this to me, the others in the house

claimed that she had become a particularly strong and independent woman because her husband was a "quiet and timid" person.

A recurring theme in our conversations would be a reflection on such different emotional "distances" that each had with their parents, and particularly how such sentimental dynamics shift during the latter stages of life. Many reflected upon the emotional aloofness they had with their fathers taking a shift when the fathers became extremely dependent on their children in their final stages of life. In such moments, interlocutors related how the fathers opened up about their memories, longings, regrets and desires. Kader, who was born in Malaysia, conveyed how his father never talked about his childhood in India until his final days while being bedridden at Kader's house. Similar anecdotes would be conveyed by other men and women when inquired about the emotional side of their fathers. The opposite was often the case with women in their old age. Interlocutors would describe the closeness they enjoyed with their mothers from childhood would often lead the latter to exercise increasing influence over them as they become older – particularly through demands made to the children. These can be to donate towards particular charities or desires to have the grandchildren married while they are alive, or requests to go on pilgrimage to Mecca or their hometown in India. In such cases, interlocutors relayed how they become committed to such requests owing to the emotional closeness with their mothers.

Rupture – Social Death

Business Closure/Disinheritance

Among the sentiment communities, the discontinuity of the business can often lead to a rupture in domestic lives. Mr Hyder was the head of a prominent Indian Muslim chain of restaurants who privately confided to me that he detested Indian Muslim social circles. Being from the

fourth generation in the family of those running the restaurant business in Malaysia, Mr Hyder was fed up with the recurring family issues that came about due to its entanglements with the business. Half of his extended family was in India and would frequently bring up disputes over land or wealth to him for mediation. The other half in Malaysia would complain about their share of the business profits and opportunities. Given how extended his familial connections are among his particular community, any sort of gathering either in India or Malaysia would have someone whom he was trying to avoid. These were given as the reason for him breaking his family tradition and allowing his only son to seek employment outside the family business and then subsequently marrying him off to an Indian Muslim woman from outside his extended family.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Mr Ashraf, who hailed from an Indian Muslim family that had a lot of businesses in the country until it all closed down in the 1980s. The family had mostly returned to India after his father passed away, but he had decided to stay back. He complained that many of his extended family in India still lived off the wealth that his father had earned. When his family decided it was time for him to get married, he was adamant that he would not marry someone from India, particularly from his extended family. He subsequently went against their decision and married a Malay woman he had fallen in love with. Yet he claimed to be proud of his Indian Muslim heritage, exemplified for him in how he made his wife learn the Tamil language and the "proper way" of cooking Indian Muslim food after their marriage. But he claimed that he would not bring his children anywhere near his "lazy" and ungrateful relatives in India.

Divorce

With the emphasis placed on the stability of monogamous marriages among Indian Muslims, divorce was an event that often led to a rupture in domestic lives. For one, it was often difficult for divorcees to re-marry – particularly for the women. A common perception would be that

the person is incapable of making compromises that are part of marital life, and as such, subsequent marriage proposals would be considerably lesser. Ramli was an Indian Muslim who was divorced and had a daughter from his previous marriage. Although I had met him to talk about Indian Muslim politics in the country, our discussion somehow veered into the domestic lives of his community. Indian Muslims had to be more "modern", he exclaimed, and stop "being so insular" – for which women were the problem as well as the victim according to him. His grandmother was married at the age of fifteen and had never been "exposed" to the world around her - her life was confined to cooking and cleaning for the family. Yet she and other women in the community wanted their daughters of the subsequent generations to "be the same". Ramli's former marriage was arranged by his family, and he claimed that he knew soon after that the marriage would not work out (he did not state the reasons why though). Yet both their families pushed them to endure and learn to compromise with each other, and suggested that having a child would "stabilize the marriage". After the birth of his daughter though, he claimed that the marriage became worse. In particular, his wife could not get along with the women in his family on how the child has to be raised. Two years in, they subsequently divorced and the child was placed in the custody of the mother after heated discussions between the families. One effect of the divorce was his gradual withdrawal from Indian Muslim social life.

Divorce can take on further repercussions when it is entangled with the business. Mrs Halima described an arranged marriage wherein the family of the bride had contributed a house for the couple. When the business of the husband's family was having certain financial difficulties, the groom decided to take a bank loan with the house as security. When subsequently the business collapsed, the family lost the house as well to the bank. This created tensions not just between the families, but between other businesses linked to each of these families. Tensions accrued within their community based upon familial and business loyalty that eventually led

not just to their divorce, but the divorce of the wife's sister whose marriage became entangled in the situation. An effect described by Mrs Halima was that both these extended families would not see a potential marital arrangement for a considerable time.

Women Unmarried/Men Marrying Outside

Perhaps the most articulated concern among my interlocutors was the presence of "unmarried" women in their communities – referring to those Indian Muslim women who were of marriageable age but were unable to find a spouse from their community. Mrs Rasiya the matchmaker laid out two reasons for this. The first was the particular way children are raised in Indian Muslim homes that discourage casual interaction between members of the opposite gender. This implied that Indian Muslim men are often more exposed to Malay women who are more "assertive" at universities, offices and markets; while Indian Muslim women would tend to avoid interactions with the opposite gender altogether. The second was the "mismatch" created by the decision of most men to not pursue extensive education that contrasted with the usual decision of women to further their studies. Both these factors combined to create an "imbalance", as Mrs Rasiya put it. Indian Muslim men were increasingly "breaking family traditions" and marrying Malay women, while Indian Muslim women rarely marry a Malay. Even if Malay men did have interest in an Indian Muslim woman, he would more often be put off by the "fussiness" of her family, Mrs Rasiya claimed. Add to that, most Indian Muslim women who were highly educated typically prefer men who are similarly well-educated. Others would be unduly "picky" and not prefer Indian Muslims who were born in India or did not speak Malay.

Thus, whenever I meet an Indian Muslim matchmaker or community leader, I would be shown a list of contacts – the majority of whom are unmarried Indian Muslim women above the age of thirty. They would usually have WhatsApp groups wherein they try to link such Indian Muslim men and women, the men often being divorcees who were looking for another

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marriage. Yet it was more common for Indian Muslim men to marry Malay women after their divorce than for Indian Muslim women. Mrs Rasiya described her exasperation over the number of parents who approach her only when their daughters are beyond their "marriageable age". Mr Kader, a community leader, agreed to add me to his such WhatsApp group, wherein he regularly posts motivational and encouraging messages to those Indian Muslims in his community who were unable to find a spouse. These issues were creating tensions and friction within families he claimed, and the least he could do was to provide emotional and mental support to them and their families.

Chapter VI: Imagined Temporalities

Introduction

In the previous three ethnographic chapters, Malaysia as a place had been confined to the background in order to foreground emotions, senses and domestic space respectively. This chapter now explores the social dimensions of Malaysia as a place inhabited by Indian Muslims through the aspect of time. Sentiments and sensibilities are temporalized here by linking them to forms of belonging that develop over a person's life. Being diasporic in Malaysia has engendered particular temporal relations among my interlocutors, the narratives of which were disclosed through imaginations of the time of their community. A sense of coevalness, of collectively moving along time as a community, frequently punctuated the articulation of such imaginations. Emotions and senses were revealed in these narratives in their movement from the past to the present or divulged through claims made over how they will advance in the future. The view of the singular "being" was often replaced in these imaginations with that of collective "becoming" – particularly over what the community has/is/will become. This chapter examines such engagements in imaginations of belonging to grasp aspects of temporality. By focusing on the place and time of the field in the first section, the diverse temporal shades of persons encountered during fieldwork are made prominent in the final section as a prelude to a theoretical exposition of personhood in anthropology in the next chapter.

In their reviews of anthropological literature on time, Birth, Kirtsoglou and Simpson identify three themes that discussions on the aspect of time have generally tended to take (Birth, 2008; Kirtsoglou & Simpson, 2020). The first is on an ontological exploration of time that conceives of it as primarily durational and universal. These have been invariably described as "physical time" or "oecological time" that transcend the social. In terms of approach, it is time conceptualized from "nowhere" (ibid, p. 2). The second theme is on demonstrating the cultural

variability of time concepts gleaned during ethnography. Typically classified as "social time", the emphasis tends to be upon diverse notions of time shared – the view from "somewhere" (ibid, p. 2). The final theme has been on the phenomenological aspect of time that links it to dimensions of human experience, particularly how time organizes thought – in effect a view from "someone" (ibid, p. 2). This chapter takes up a "non-ontological" approach to time (Ringel, 2016, p. 393), combining the latter two social and experiential dimensions of time in anthropology. Temporality in this sense is explored through acts and imaginations of belonging that my interlocutors engaged in. Ethnography thereby became a mode of "temporal dwelling" (Dalsgaard & Nielsen 2013, p. 9) – an attempt to orient me into these temporalities of my interlocutors. The sense of temporal dwelling here was more than a simple act of being there, with care taken to avoid displacing them out of their temporalities. This "presentist approach" (Ringel, 2016, p. 393) explores practices that uphold social relations which can be potentially disturbed or dissolved[90]. An implication is to begin from an indeterminate conception of the present, for better recognition of the role of the future in the present and past of interlocutors' narratives and conceptions. By allowing such narratives and experiences to frame their multiple temporalities and often competing rhythms, outlines of personhood are gleaned through intersubjective relations that are temporally conditioned.

Time and Imagination

Benedict Andersons' "Imagined Communities" made an influential historical argument for understanding national identity as being shaped under a modern conception of collective time (Anderson, 2006). The present in these national imaginations was conceived as a "homogenous empty time"[91] along which a collective social body moves. Printing was identified as the prime

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[90] While "ethnographic present" as a trope has been extensively critiqued for representing a "petrified" distance between the ethnographer and their interlocutors (Fabian, 2014, p.143), the sense of present here alludes more to its indeterminacy, beyond a simple recognition of the partiality of fieldwork timespan.
[91] Anderson claims to have been inspired by Walter Benjamin's use of the phrase (Anderson, 2006, p. 24).

medium through which this social imaginary of shared national identity and destiny was engendered. Yet beyond this sense of simultaneity within the present, it is territorial space rather than time that is more crucial for Andersons' conception of national imaginations. In contrast to Anderson's historical approach, this chapter ethnographically examines this simultaneity as indeterminate – consisting of entangled and often conflicting temporalities within a nation, community, and possibly within a single person as well. It builds on two counterarguments raised over Andersons' thesis – one historical and the other theoretical. The first is that transnational or diasporic imaginaries were sustained at the same periods through the same print media outlined by Anderson (Amrith, 2013, p. 165)[92]. What is thus claimed to be a specific feature of national imaginations can be historically observed in diasporic ones as well. The second is a criticism over an undertheorized conception of imagination in Anderson's work (Crapanzano, 2004, p. 212), one that is heavily indexed upon standardized literary practices (Silverstein, 2002, p. 124). Along these lines, Wogan has argued against juxtaposing print to orality (Wogan, 2001), while Sutton has made a similarly compelling argument for sensations attached to food as a non-linguistic medium for national identity (Sutton, 2001, p. 84). It is within this backdrop that this chapter locates emotions and senses as key components of such temporal imaginations. The present as a "horizon" (Munn, 1990, p. 1) becomes heterogeneously linked to the past and future, apprehended or experienced through cultural processes of organization and exchange illustrated in the previous chapters. Temporalities linked to belonging here become revealed not just in narratives of lived experiences, but also in their unfolding through social actions.

This chapter begins with an ethnography of the latter – those social actions that engender imaginations of belonging – as a means to elucidate its processes. To this end, the chapter

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[92] Refer also to Fakhri (Fakhri, 2002) for instances of Indian Muslims in Malaya engaging in transnational imaginaries through print– although the notion of time as empty or homogenous is not the focus in Amrith's or Fakhri's arguments.

delineates Islam as a site of action for belonging. The entanglements of race/ethnicity and religion in Malaysia, particularly that of Malay ethnicity and Islam, have produced a spectrum of imagination among Indian Muslims – ranging from assimilation to ethnic mobilization. The processual aspect of these imaginations is explored through the frames of bureaucratization and ritualization. Bureaucracy and ritual are taken as frames due to their analogous capacities to stimulate, although in different ways, imaginations of boundedness – whether as a community, nation or Islamic *Ummah*. They are not juxtaposed here to contrast competing logics of national versus transnational, nor of discipline against representation. While such competing logics can be at play, it will be concurrently shown how an ostensibly national logic of bureaucracy can induce transnational imaginations through policies of exclusion, while communally representative rituals of Islam can become an avenue to include Malays while excluding other Indians. The analytical employment of frames here goes beyond a search for such underlying logic. Rather, I investigate how bureaucracies and rituals *frame* social relations that predispose persons to think, feel and sense in particular ways (Handelman, 1981, p. 12)[93]. While Islam is indubitably present in social relations outside these frames, emotions and senses linked to imaginations of belonging were particularly denser or more intense within these frames. Islam through these frames was key for my interlocutors to disclose their dispositions towards the past and future of their community, and a critical site for me to engage with the accompanying emotions and senses stirred in the present.

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[93] I appeal to Terence Turner's definition of frames as "a category of activity or propositional relations that also serve as a schema for the interpretation of those activities or propositions to which it is applied" (Turner, 2022, p. 297).

Framing Temporal Imaginations

<u>Bureaucratization</u>

Academic discussions of bureaucracy often associate it with disenchanted modernity, state classification and formalization. Anthropological literature on bureaucracy has tended to move beyond an institutionalized conception of bureaucracy, and towards an exploration of its underlying logic or social effects. The functioning of a bureaucratic "ethos" (Handelman, 1997, p. 390) has come to be analyzed as a "social phenomenon" that has to be constantly reproduced through classificatory practices (Herzfeld, 2021, p. 4). The effects of these classificatory powers can significantly seep into other social settings, wherein they can acquire particular social meanings. In this sense, bureaucratization has been espoused as a means of exploring the manifold meanings produced by the different forms bureaucracies take up (Müller, 2017). This chapter goes along this analytical route, wherein bureaucratization is taken up as a frame to explore the effects of Islam being intimately tied to the Malay ethnicity in Malaysia. There has been a surge in the literature that indicate the increasing bureaucratization of Islam in the country – ranging from personal law (Mohamad, 2010; Shuaib, 2012), developmental policies (Peletz, 2013) and banking/finance (Kitamura, 2021; Sloane-White, 2017). The analysis is not concerned with the underlying logic that pervades these bureaucratic practices, but rather with the responses it stimulates among my interlocutors – particularly over what their community has/is/will become. This section provides an overview of some of the palpable encounters of bureaucracy by my interlocutors and the responses they have generated, before embarking upon more subtle processes of bureaucratization later in the chapter.

Perhaps this sense of bureaucratization is most visible in the ownership of government identity cards (IC) that displays the religion of the holder. These ICs are digitally linked through an in-built encryption chip to one's birth certificate that states the "race" of the person. Majida described to me the earlier IC without these chips that only mentioned the race of the person.

She recalled how she wrote "Muslim" with a pen beside the "Indian" race on her card during her school days. This was a common practice among her Indian Muslim friends who did not want to be mistaken as a non-Muslim by administrators or officials. Mr Hameed revealed how most Indian Muslims he knew would employ certain tactics to obtain the Malay race for their children on their birth certificates. These certificates used to be manually issued by bureaucratic officers, who would fill in the details according to the application submitted. It used to be the case that Indian Muslims would go to these offices dressed in Malay attire and take particular attention to speaking Malay fluently. They would try to convince these officers that the child is Malay owing to being Muslim, and argue that stating them as Indians might confuse them to be Hindus. It was also the case that certain officers would be identified beforehand in these offices as sympathetic to such arguments, or sometimes even susceptible to bribes that could allow for it. Yet during my time in the field, these procedures had become computerized, with the race designation on birth certificates being linked to the IC chips of the parents. Mr Hameed insists though that there still are some loopholes for potentially obtaining the Malay category. He admitted though that the chances are less, as it depended on at least one of the parents having the Malay race on their document. Regardless of whether one identifies as Malay or not, he stated, obtaining it on one's official documents in the country had substantial state benefits. It was obvious to him that this was the best way forward for the future of Indian Muslims. I pointed out a few couples I knew, neither of whom had the Malay race on their documents, and subsequently did not succeed in obtaining it for their children. To him this was "unfortunate", but he could already see glimpses of how some are trying to overcome them. He pointed out an arranged marriage wherein a person with the Malay race on their birth certificate was paired with one who did not have it. Although this was not the primary condition for the arrangement, it was pointed out as an advantage by both sets of parents. Another familial

strategy I observed was the accrual of land reserved for Malays under the name of one sibling among four who was the only one fortunate in obtaining the Malay race on his birth certificate.

The effects of bureaucratization can also be observed in forms of representation, particularly in the very practice of naming – either through standardization of Malay-Muslim names or through normative pressures to adopt them. The use of *bin/binti* (son/daughter of) in between the first and last names, the particular spelling of names according to Malay custom[94] and prefixing *Siti/Nor* to female names were widespread among the younger generation of Indian Muslims. Hamza was born in Malaysia and given a very Malay-sounding name. He was a high-ranking employee in a prestigious firm in the country. He described how Malays, expecting him to be a Malay given his name on the door-board, would enter his room with the Islamic greeting "*Assalamualaikum*", but would stop short when they see his face with Indian features. They would then double-check if he was Muslim and continue. Some would be curious and inquire if he was a "convert". Given such settings, Muslim names that were common among Indian Muslims but not among Malays like *Shahul Hameed, Meeran or Mydin/Moideen* have become unappealing among the younger generation. These classificatory measures extend to Islamic rituals and practices as well. When the pandemic restrictions were being gradually eased in Malaysia in 2020, mosques began to open up for the five daily communal prayers – albeit with certain conditions. The main condition was that only Malaysian citizens were to be allowed in, to limit entry and maintain social distancing measures during the prayer. Particularly for the Friday prayers, police officers often monitored those entering the mosques. All my Indian Muslim interlocutors who attended these Friday prayers described that they were asked for their Malaysian identification cards because of their "non-Malay" physical features.

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[94] An example is replacing the "*sh*" consonant in English to "*sy*" in Malay.

Another common encounter of state bureaucracy was with issues of residence permits, passports and citizenship. This was particularly more relevant among the sentiment communities as there were many 'Indian' passport holders among them (those among the sensibility communities were all Malaysian citizens). Temporary residence permits were often arranged among these interlocutors through familial and business links, while permanent residency and citizenship depended upon accumulated time spent in the country. While these were not particularly difficult to obtain for my interlocutors, it was not a straightforward choice either. Some families would opt to retain the Indian passports of some of their members, particularly the women. The key reason given was for retaining the landed wealth back in India under the family. These members would live in the country under temporary or permanent residencies and forego the chance to take up citizenship. These dynamics were interestingly incorporated into the running and administration of the associations outlined in the previous chapter. Three such prominent associations had placed the condition that only permanent residents and Malaysian citizens can become full members with voting rights and eligibility to become elected representatives, while temporary visa holders can become associate members. Representatives from these three associations stated that this would ensure the continuity of the elected committee, as these members tend to not return to India for good. It also was crucially linked to the concern the elected person would have towards those residing in Malaysia, and not solely be concerned with the native place in India.

Ritualization

The study of ritual has a deep history within anthropology, being intimately tied to other concepts like myth, religion and belief (Tylor, 1889; Smith, 1995; Bellah, 2005). Examinations of the concept have been diverse, from emphasizing its functional role for social coherence (Homans, 1941; Gluckman, 1962), to its communicative role for transmitting symbolic meaning (Turner, 1970; Geertz, 1957). A common theme in these analyses was to take up ritual

as a medium – either for power (Bloch, 2020), order (Munn, 1973), transformation (Van Gennep, 2013) or communication (Tambiah, 1979). The focus of this section is not on ritual per se, but on the notion of "ritualization". The consideration here extends to those actions that need not neatly map onto an accepted domain of ritual, but can include those actions that may be classified as habit or custom[95].

Under this broadened scope of ritualization, the emphasis shifts from the issue of meaning in ritual to that of the process – particularly on when and how actions become rituals (Bell, 1992; 1997; Laidlaw and Humphrey, 1994). I take up the two cited theories here due to the prominence they give to the notion of ritualization. Bell argues that prior theories of ritual depended upon a "thought-action" dichotomy. Rituals emerge in these theories as a means to re-integrate them through different forms of embodiment. In contrast, Bell argues for an approach where the body is not granted theoretical priority, in order to arrive at more complex theories of ritual. For this, she puts forward ritualization as practices that distinguish certain actions as ritual. The exploration of such practices would reveal that this distinguishing power resides not with the agents themselves or in an ostensible social order, but in the continuity of these practices. Thus formality, convention and repetition change from being features of ritual to "strategies" of ritualization (Bell, 1997, p. 145). Intentionality is no longer of instrumental utility, but of a practical one that seeks to extend power generated through ritualization beyond the ritual act (Bell, 1992, p. 171). Humphrey and Laidlaw, on the other hand, stress the "non-intentionality" of ritual acts. They imply that the intention of the acting person is displaced during the ritual which makes the prescriptive source ambiguous. Through this, they argue that rituals are not fundamentally a communicative medium wherein the participants receive preexisting meanings or messages. Rather, meanings are subsequently attributed, culturally

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[95] What distinguishes an action as rituals here is a matter of quality, with any social act having the potential to become ritualized.

derived or even effectively absent. Moving away from the primacy accorded to meaning, ritual for them is thus a distinctive way in which any action is performed. Beyond passive enactors of imposed or assumed messages, there is a purposive quality to the acts of the participants. Ritualization is thus the qualitative transformation of action into ritual through a subtle change in the relation between action and intention. The theoretical attention is therefore on this distinctive quality that ritual action comes to have Laidlaw and Humphrey, 1994).

The prominence given to the processual aspect of ritual in these theories is adopted in this chapter. Yet despite the theoretical sophistication that these two theories put forward on ritualization, their explanatory power beyond ritual is rather limited. Handelman perceptively notes that the utility of these theories ends once actions become a ritual, "as there is nothing beyond ritualization except further ritualization" (Handelman, 1998, p. xviii). In contrast to a quest for an ontology of rituals as in Humphrey and Laidlaw Laidlaw and Humphrey, 1994, p. 96), the concern here is more on how they frame social relations. This is possible to an extent in Bell through the analysis of power generated in ritual practices, and the subsequent values produced through the "dynamics of framing" in ritual performances (Bell, 1997 p. 160). But as opposed to the unravelling of power relations in rituals, my focus is on their social embeddedness that engenders imaginations of collective simultaneity in time. Through such an exploration of their social embeddedness, ritualization here seeks to explain the shifting or stable articulations that certain practices took on among my interlocutors. One such prominent articulation was to conceive of these practices as a form of response to bureaucratization in Malaysia. It is at this junction that I explore Islam as a site of action, where ritualization as a response to bureaucratization engender collective imaginations of boundedness. My focus is on temporal imaginations generated by these frames – disclosed through emotions or senses connected to belonging.

The ritual of *Manqus Maulood* among the Malabaris in Johor discussed in chapter four is taken up here as an illustrative case. While the recital of *Maulood/Mawlid* is traditionally performed on the birthday of the Prophet throughout the Muslim world, I had shown that the *Manqus Maulood* among the Malabaris was given particular prominence as a marker of their identity. A ritual that is traditionally recited once a year among Muslims was often performed every week among them. While the *Ustads* brought over by them from India who perform these rituals did not know the recitals by heart, their particular tone and rhythm were given an air of authenticity that was distinct from how Malays traditionally recited their *Mawlids*. Paradoxically though, the fact that Malabaris were used to hearing it frequently meant that many of them had memorized it, unlike the *Ustads*. One reiteration of this embeddedness was a *Manqus Maulood* competition organized in Kuala Lumpur on December 7th 2019, in which students from the Malabari *Madrasas* throughout Malaysia competed on its recitation and memorization; and were quizzed on its history and content. The *Ustads* who served as judges at this event could not understand the importance given to the *Manqus Maulood*, and some even commented to me that such efforts might have better gone into memorizing the *Quran* or other far more important texts. Mr Yacob, who runs the *Madrasa* I was based at in Johor, said he understands the complaints of the *Ustads*, but they should try to understand that the *Manqus Maulood* is one of the last remnants of their "heritage". The fact that the ritual of *Mawlid* is visibly practiced and bureaucratically promoted among Muslims in Malaysia implied to him and his community that their particular *Mawlid* has to be equally, if not more, distinctively present. Exposing the subsequent generations of Malabaris to its sensory dimensions – through its recital, tonality and particularly through the gustatory references described in chapter four – became a means of imbibing their communal identity along lines that the wider Malaysian society can identify as Islamic. Temporal imaginations of the community were often revealed on these occasions through articulations of pragmatic efforts to resist an impending "loss" of

their Malabari culture and gradual "assimilation" into Malay culture through these actions. Distinct sensibilities were stabilized here for this through the ritualization of a practice that was discernibly Islamic.

On the other hand, practices that could betray a sense of being un-Islamic often took on shifting articulations. The female attire of the *Saree*, a long single cloth that is wrapped around the body for special occasions, is a case in point. Indian Muslim women of earlier generations or those in India wore/wear it occasionally as their traditional attire, particularly for weddings. The fact that one side of the hip is often exposed in this attire, and that it is worn by the other predominantly Hindu Indian women in the country today, led many Indian Muslim women would make it a point to convey to me that they would never wear a *Saree.* This for others was often articulated as an instance of a "loss" of Indian Muslim culture. Such shifts can also be down to the bureaucratization of Islam outlined earlier. These interplays will be explored in the following section through the three themes of language, patronage and marriage respectively; in which bureaucratization and ritualization as frames engender temporal imaginations of belonging.

Language

One prominent aspect in which Indian Muslim culture was located by my interlocutors was in the use of Tamil or Malayalam language among their community. For many, the loss of fluency in their native languages was a key indicator of the erosion of their culture. For others, the ability to converse in their native tongue was an indication that their culture was intact. These were illustrated in the previous chapter, in which sentiments and sensibilities were familiarized in domestic spaces through "cultured tongues". This section extends the analysis towards actions connected to language that brought about temporal imaginations. A recurring identification of bureaucratization here by my interlocutors was in the education system of

Malaysia[96]. The vast majority of Indian Muslims attended public Malay schools, where the primary language of instruction and communication is Malay. Furthermore, these schools would have *Agama* classes for Islamic education that must be attended by all Muslim students which was taught in Malay. There was a frequent expression of a pressure to be fluent in Malay by my interlocutors who had attended these schools. They contrasted this to the situation of their non-Muslim colleagues, who did not necessarily have the same pressure. Being the only Indian who was a Muslim in his class, Asif described how he often pretended to not know Tamil at school, which meant that most of his friends at school were Malays. He spoke Tamil only at home, and with his relatives and cousins outside school. Others expressed the opposite. Bilal claimed that he was never accepted by his Malay schoolmates, and found it irritating that the first question he would typically be asked was if he was Muslim. He had three Indian Muslim friends at school who all felt the same, and they subsequently became particularly close even after graduation. During a dinner with them, they informed me about an Indian Muslim youth association they had formed with others who similarly felt excluded as Indian Muslims. Although it was comparatively inactive during my fieldwork, they had a WhatsApp group of 86 members in which there were often intense discussions about their future in Malaysia. After being added to this group by Bilal, I found to my surprise that most of the discussion – either through text or voice messages – occurred in Malay. According to Bilal, most of them did not know how to read or write in Tamil, while a few members were Urdu speakers and did not know Tamil. Malay had thus become the link language for them, even though most of them lamented the gradual loss of native tongues among Indian Muslims. The bureaucratization of language framed a sense of exclusion that engendered a response of ethnic mobilization here, yet language as the very form of this exclusion had paradoxically seeped into this response.

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[96] Although this was not directly connected to bureaucracy as such by them, the sense of its institutionalization can be directly subsumed under the notion of bureaucratization laid out earlier.

There were also more reflective articulations over the loss of language, with an understanding of it being gradual and generational. Mrs Ghani, a Malaysian-born Indian Muslim, had five grandchildren studying in Malay schools. She described how the Malay language, growing up in her household of immigrant parents, was limited between her siblings and friends. After being married to an Indian Muslim born in the country, the language they spoke often switched between Malay and Tamil – but she pointed out that intimacy was mostly expressed in Tamil. Yet while subsequently raising their three children, the Malay language started to become more prominent at home. The children preferred to speak in Malay, and Tamil came up primarily in interactions with their broader family and relatives from India. For the next generation of her grandchildren, the language at home has become exclusively Malay. "What is spoken at school and work will eventually come into the house", she exclaimed. A gradual frown appeared on her face, and she remarked that expressing intimacy with her grandchildren in Malay often left her feeling unfulfilled. She disclosed how her relatives in India often complain to her when visiting Malaysia that they cannot relate to the grandchildren because of their unfamiliarity with Tamil. The latter as a result never desire to visit India and their extended family there. She reflectively remarked that the schooling system had gradually "taken away" their mother tongue over generations, and this will eventually sever the "roots" of their community.

One practice among the sentiment communities that was often projected as a response to this was to enrol their children at schools in India. There was a general opinion among these communities that the education system in India was comparatively better than that available at Malay public schools. Certain schools in Tamil Nadu catered to such requirements of Indian Muslim parents in Malaysia by providing boarding facilities for these children, often beginning from around the age of eight to ten. Kin members in India would often act as their guardians while they are in India, and the children would visit Malaysia once or twice a year during vacations. Rayyan had been sent to India for his schooling at the age of eight and had returned

for his undergraduate degree. He described how all his male cousins and friends from his community had similarly been sent to India, most of them to the same school. As a result, there was an expectation early in his childhood that he would be sent as well. The ritualization of this practice was often described as a transformative process of maturation for the person, and as such he relished the opportunity. It was illustrated in the previous chapter that Rayyan had laid this practice as the reason for his desire for a spouse who had also grown up in India. It was during this discussion that I came to know that a gender dynamic was involved. Only boys were sent alone to such boarding schools, while girls were rather sent with their mothers, who would settle with their daughters during their education in India. Ayisha was raised in her village in India with her mother, while her father ran a business in Malaysia. The decision of the family to relocate Ayisha and her mother to India around the age of six was based on mistrust of Malaysian education system. Malay public schools were seen by her family as turning the children into Malays, due to a "pressure to assimilate" as Muslims. Chinese schools were considered as providing a rigorous education, but were said to often deny girls the right to wear Islamic dress, while Tamil schools were perceived as poorly funded and lacking an Islamic ambience. Ayisha's mother had most of her family in India, and as such, they decided to settle there until she finishes high school.

While this ritualization of seeking education in India was common among the sentiment communities during my fieldwork, this was generally not an option open to the sensibility communities as they rarely had family members back in India. Rather, the response among Malabaris in Johor was articulated in the form of the *Madrasa* that was detailed in chapter four. Malabari children were ritually sent to the *Madrasas* run by them despite the fact the Malay schools teach the same Islamic lessons as the *Agama* classes. The emphasis here rather was to reflect those lessons through the Malayalam language through *Ustads* brought in from India. It was illustrated in chapter four how the senses play a crucial role in these pedagogic spaces, and

how there was a conscious intention on the part of the parents to impart the language through such sensibilities.

Beyond these, I also observed the framing of language in facets of collective representation – particularly in the names of Indian Muslim organizations during my fieldwork. While many of these organizations had been officially registered even before independence under English designations of association, club or committee; they had all shifted to the Malay equivalent of *Persatuan* or *Warisan* during my fieldwork. This often extended to the titles of the delegations as well. Haji Bashir described an earlier time when English was the language of prestige within an umbrella organization that sought to represent all Indian Muslims in the country. Besides the name of these associations being in English, Haji Bashir informed of a general expectation of the heads of this organization to be eloquent in English as well. He claimed that this has gradually shifted to Malay due to an increasing concern to represent themselves as Muslims in contrast to the majority of other Indians in Malaysia. He narrated an incident where an official delegation of this organization had a meeting with the then Prime Minister of the country – Mahathir Mohammad. They had discussed the social position of Indian Muslims in the country, to which Mahathir responded that all Indian Muslims had to do to feel comfortable in the country was to be fluent in Malay. Bureaucratization as a frame can be perceived here through acts of representation that linked Islam and the Malay language.

One form of ritualized response to the above sort of bureaucratization I observed was to bring Tamil and Malayalam into public events through performative acts. Islamic rituals conducted by *Ustads* from India were typically followed with a sermon in Tamil or Malayalam – even among audiences where most did not understand the language. Another response was the promotion of folk songs in Tamil or Malayalam, particularly Islamic songs, which were ceremonially sung during public gatherings. The songs of Nagoor Haniffa, a renowned singer of Tamil Islamic songs in India, were regularly sung on stage by a particular generation of

Tamil Muslims. Mr Shahir was a senior person who pointedly described himself as promoting Indian Muslim culture in Malaysia through these songs. He had rendered a few versions himself of these songs that were sold on CDs throughout Malaysia, organized a yearly concert in remembrance of Nagoor Haniffa, and often sang them live on Malaysian television and radio. Mr Kader was similarly a representative person among Malabaris in Johor. Being one of the few who had a firm grasp of the Malayalam language and could particularly sing well, he was often invited to events to sing Islamic folk *Mappila* songs. Such sensory experiences and aural delights were narrated as providing an Indian Muslim ambience to these public gatherings. Language was also brought into daily life through certain domestic practices. Mr Haroon had designated one day of the week when his wife and two children were not allowed to speak Malay inside their home, rather there was an attempt to learn Malayalam by trying to limit their conversations to this language on that particular day. Similarly, there was a WhatsApp group among Malabaris in which a new word in Malayalam was introduced to its members every day. The members would then try to frame a sentence in Malayalam using that word through voice recordings. Boundedness was being inculcated by framing relations through such ritualized practices of language. Yet the frame of bureaucratization would constantly emerge in daily life. Mr Ziauddin was introduced to me as an ardent promoter of the Malayalam language in his community. But during a casual conversation, he revealed that he conversed in English with his grandchildren who were living in Qatar, as that was the language that his son's family spoke in at home. When this family contemplated moving back to Malaysia, Mr Ziauddin advised the children to rather learn Malay or else face being socially excluded.

Patronage

Patronage in this section is explored through certain expectations, either from the state or from the community, that oriented temporal imaginations among my interlocutors. My usage of the term patronage here alludes more to aspects of the distribution and circulation of resources,

rather than to a sense of a superior-subordinate relationship. In this sense, bureaucratization and ritualization as frames are connected to the circulation of wealth and privilege among Indian Muslims. Since the independence of the country in 1957, and particularly since the New Economic Policy (NEP) that was introduced in 1971, Malays were granted privileges owing to a perceived economic marginalization despite being majority of the population. These included housing plans, educational scholarships, land rights and job quotas. As was shown in chapter four, the sensibility communities gradually realized certain loopholes that made some of these benefits attainable owing to them being Muslims. Some among the sentiment communities expressed the perception that depending on such affirmative actions had made the Malays "passive" and "lazy" – which was inimical to the entrepreneurial spirit that is required for the business[97]. There was thus a conscious inculcation among such Indian Muslims to rather depend on the support provided through their kin networks, which was often channelled through certain ritualized practices. For others among these communities who had moved on from the family businesses though, state privileges and support systems often become appealing or were even claimed to be necessary for a sustainable life. As shown earlier, this was one reason why most Indian Muslims would attempt to obtain the Malay ethnicity on the birth certificates of their children. This section explores how bureaucratization and ritualization in these contexts engender notions of boundedness and consequent temporal imaginations.

Shamila had applied for a government scholarship for Muslim students to finance her graduate studies at a prestigious Malaysian university. Her teachers and friends had recommended this, as she had excellent grades to bolster her application. She received a reply that her application had been "conditionally" accepted, pending on a final interview. Two other Malay friends who

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[97] One person had even written a public op-ed in a newspaper declaring that Indian Muslims should not seek to be accepted as Malays in order to gain benefits, but should rather be proud of themselves as Indian Muslims: https://www.malaymail.com/news/what-you-think/2017/07/21/why-indian-muslims-should-not-be-made-bumiputeras-an-indian-muslim/1425711 (last accessed 02-03-2023).

had received it as well informed her that they had been unconditionally awarded the scholarship. A few days later, they were informed that the interview would be held at their house, for which officials will come to visit her on a particular day. Shamila's family gathered that the issue was her parent's official documents, which stated that they were of Indian ethnicity. They prepared for the visit by wearing Malay clothes and speaking in fluent Malay during the visit. While the official did not pointedly ask if they were Muslims or Malays, Shamila felt that they were scrutinizing them intensely. When they were served *Kueh*, a Malay delicacy, the officials expressed surprise at the fact that the mother had made it herself. By the end of the interview, the officials congratulated her on her successful application and wished her well for her future studies. Once they had left, her father humorously exclaimed that they had successfully convinced the officials of their "Malay"-ness.

While bureaucratization is subtly visible here through the state patronage of Malays by linking it to the Muslim identity, of more relevance here is the response it generated among Shamila's family. When I subsequently met with her father, he was adamant that Indian Muslims had to "assimilate" to be "comfortable". This need not mean that Indian Muslims "have to throw away" their culture. Rather, assimilation for him was primarily a matter of representing themselves as Muslims. Being fluent in Malay and comfortable in Malay attire was sometimes all it took. True, he still preferred his community to marry among themselves and retain some of their domestic practices. But being Muslim in Malaysia had its "benefits", and Indian Muslims just need to be "strategic" over representing themselves.

Other experiences brought about different responses and temporal imaginations. Hameed was a Malabari who was denied admission at a Malay-only university because he did not qualify as a "Malay". He subsequently wrote a scathing letter to a dean there, charging the university of racism and violating his rights as a Muslim and Malay-speaking citizen. Despite protests from his father against sending the letter, the university surprisingly redacted its earlier position and

granted him admission. Hameed would regularly cite this episode to argue that Indian Muslims have to be "aggressive" and "demanding" in order to gain from the state – as they will never be completely accepted as Malays despite all they do to assimilate.

Nasima, on the other hand, was denied admission at several universities as an Indian despite having good grades – as she did not qualify under the Malay quotas. Her father likewise had been earlier denied a teaching position at a public school for the same reason. She would frequently indicate these instances to express her loyalty to India despite being a Malaysian citizen. Nasima's mother was an Indian citizen, and her father insisted on retaining her Indian citizenship due to this experience. All their children, including Nasima, were married to spouses raised in India which she claimed to have inculcated a sense of allegiance to India. Conversely, some who were recipients of state patronage expressed the need to be "grateful" and indebted to the Malay population in the country. Mr Masood was from the Kadayanallur-Tenkasi community in Penang, many of whom were shown in chapter four as living in public housings that were intended for Malays. He described how he dislikes accusations and derogatory comments that some Indian Muslims make about Malays. Rather for him, it was the "open-mindedness" of Malays that allowed minorities like him to be "comfortable" in the country. Bureaucratization in these instances, either through inclusion or exclusion, can be perceived as framing diverse temporal relations – temporality here being connected to belonging. For some, their community was enjoying the comforts of being Muslim in the country, while for others this involved a sense of discrimination or exclusion.

Ritualization as a response to such bureaucratic frames was primarily observed in attempts to inculcate sustenance within the community. This was predominantly observed through particular modes of exchange and circulation of wealth amongst themselves. A complex form of this are the business practices of the sentiment communities that were illustrated in chapter three. Financing depended heavily upon the support provided by kin networks. Banking loans

for education, or for the accrual of houses or cars that were available to the citizens, were generally frowned upon. Kin members were rather obliged to circulate wealth among themselves[98]. These could be for requirements for the business that arose upon short notice, or for expenses that might be beyond a person's capacity at a moment in time – like weddings or educational expenses of children. Bigger investments were circulated through more elaborate means of familial partnership or arranged marriages detailed in chapters three and five. Yet even with such internal circulation of wealth and capital among the sentiment communities, there had to be certain compromises due to the bureaucratic and financial regulations in the country. Mr Tajuddin described how his father earlier was forced to take up a bank loan for his restaurant business to comply with accounting protocols – despite being able to raise such additional capital from within their kin networks. This was at a time when Indian Muslims rarely engaged with such "external" financial institutions. As such economic activities have gradually become increasingly bureaucratized through regulations, he relays how Indian Muslim businesses often have no option but engage in these external financial mediations. This, he claims, has led to "unchecked" expansion of the business by "overzealous" entrepreneurs, who try to open branches through such financing without having the familial capacity to administer them properly. A consequence he sees in his community is increasing cases of bankruptcy or families in huge debts. Given how the economic is intimately tied to their domestic domain, he foresees such financial instabilities seeping into the larger social relations of the community. The two conceptualized frames appear to be competing here. While the ritualization of kin-based patronage is framed as a mobilizing response to the bureaucratic realities of the country, the bureaucratic frames also appear to affect the circulation and distribution of resources among themselves.

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[98] Particular practices of manually circulating cash were illustrated in chapter three, as a means of evading banks that many consider as dabbling in usury and thus "un-Islamic".

In chapter three, Akram lamented the increasing accrual of bank loans that were affecting their traditional charitable practices. This link between wealth and charity is crucial here, as it allows for a conception of these charitable practices as a form of kin-based patronage. The native associations were heavily involved in charitable works – either to support their kin back in India or amongst those residing in Malaysia. They were involved in building educational institutions, mosques, hospitals and other services for the locality. It was shown in chapter five how there would be a healthy competition between these associations of engaging in charity towards their native localities in India. Mr Ali had described in chapter five how his particular native association would compete with its fellow diasporic associations in the Middle East or Singapore in raising the highest amount of donations towards a particular charitable project. These were also directed towards welfare in Malaysia. Meritorious students were awarded cash prizes or educational scholarships, debt-ridden members were granted financial help, and those having extensive medical costs were provided relief services. Ritualization of such activities was often framed by them as a "communal" or "traditional" response to bureaucratic practices of the state, which engendered a sense of belonging to the community.

Given that everyone among the sensibility communities was based in Malaysia, such charity works were directed at the local community, rather than focusing on remittances to India. A charity drive was organized by the JMMJ Malabari association to provide relief to Malabari houses that were affected by a flood. Mr Yacob described how he did not have such communal support during his childhood, due to which he was often averse towards his community then. He felt inclined to organize such drives so that the next generation of Malabaris does not feel the same sense of neglect. Similar drives were held during the month of Ramadan, wherein specific targets were often set. Rival associations would compete to lay claim over who patronizes the community better. This representative aspect was also visible with Indian Muslim heritage sites like mosques or shrines, which have a board of elected members that

administer charity works as a means of patronage. The Indian Muslim mosques in Kuala Lumpur and Penang have their traditional "*Morai*" list (illustrated in chapter three) which lists the names of the families that contribute towards the regular feeding of the poor organized by the mosque. Families and businesses would compete over obtaining a date on the list, with slots often being booked well in advance. Interestingly, all Indian Muslim associations were regularly approaching wealthy Malays for *Zakah* (Islamically mandated charity) or *Sadaqah* (voluntary donation). These were for helping deprived Indian Muslims in the country, but also for individuals and projects in India. One association had launched a project wherein the ritually mandated animal sacrifice done during the month of *Hajj* was arranged in a particular village in India, with the meat being distributed to the poor there. A significant amount was donated by Malay Muslims, for which the posters and videos of the event were designed in the Malay language. Such ritualized practices of charity provided an avenue for Indian Muslims to incorporate Malays through donations, but rarely (if ever) extended to non-Muslim Indians in the country. Malays were frequently invited as guests to such programs, or taken over to visit and inspect charity sites – sometimes even in India. Ritualization in these instances is framing relations wherein Islam induces collective imaginations of belonging that sideline race or ethnicity.

Marriage

Marriage among Muslims has become a field of intense bureaucratization in Malaysia, as attested by several recent studies. Maznah Mohamad details the rise in "Islamization" in the country through state bureaucratic policies and performative measures that have fashioned a new "Muslim masculinity" (Mohamad, 2010, p. 362). As a means of sustaining a Malay-Islamic majority through such institutional efforts, the bureaucratization of Islam is claimed to have resulted in the undoing of the Malay family. Peletz has focused on the rise of the "syariah judiciary" and expansion of Islamic law as a "global assemblage" (Peletz, 2013, p. 606),

arguing rather that the processes of bureaucratization here are more informed by vestiges of colonial practices and British common-law sensibilities. Nurul Huda has detailed the bureaucratic surveillance and policing of sexuality among Malays as a means of confining sexual intimacies within marital relationships. Enforcement of pro-marriage policies has liberalized access to marriage in many ways – particularly through polygamous relationships. But these, she argues, have placed an undue burden on women to marry before they adequately engage in intimacy (Razif, 2020, p. 329). While these studies tend to focus on sites of marital or legal conflicts, my interlocutors were particularly intent on avoiding or evading such bureaucratic or legal apparatus as much as possible. It was ethnographically illustrated in the previous chapter how a commitment to arranged monogamy was strongly inculcated among Indian Muslims through domestic practices. Ritualization of such practices is a response to those bureaucratic settings and a key aspect through which many Indian Muslims differentiate themselves from Malays. Beyond the spatiality of sentiments and sensibilities connected to marriage as in the previous chapter, the following section focuses on its temporal elements that induced collective imaginations.

Among the sentiment communities, it was shown in chapter three that arranged marriages were intimately linked to the expansion of family businesses. In a long reflective conversation, Haji Shabeer detailed how such connections between business and marriage were a phenomenon that emerged in Malaysia. In contrast, among Muslims based in their hometowns in India earlier, such arranged marriages were not dictated by business concerns, as most did not engage in trade or business then. Such practices were earlier described as a feature of certain Hindu castes like the *Chettiars*. It was due to the gendered migration and boom in the restaurant and currency-exchange businesses in the late 20th century in Malaysia, according to him, that such practices became upheld by these Indian Muslim communities. Ritualization of this particular form of marriage, involving the circulation of wealth and patronage within the community,

depended on strict monogamy. Connected to this was the ritualization of marrying a spouse in India, which was also illustrated in the previous chapter as a mode of maintaining the continuity of domestic spaces. While the sensibility communities did not have these economic and transnational dynamics, marriage was still ritually arranged by the family. Belonging as a notion is palpable in such frames of ritualization, but my focus here is on its interactions with the bureaucratic frames observed during fieldwork. The effects of increasing bureaucratization of transnational marriages, the practice of retaining the Indian citizenship of some women, and the privileges attached to obtaining the Malay race on one's state documents were touched upon earlier. This section now focuses on other instances where bureaucratization and ritualization intersect to induce temporal imaginations.

Haniyya's marriage had been arranged to Majid, an Indian Muslim from her community who had grown up in Malaysia like her. Upon attempting to register their marriage, the authorities informed them that they would have to enrol for a government-authorized "marriage course" as Malaysian Muslims before they are eligible for marriage. These courses took place on weekends and took five days, wherein they attended lectures by authorized personnel along with twenty-two other couples. While most of the discussions revolved around the procedural aspects of marriage concerning bureaucracy and law, Haniyya described her shock over some discussions that she felt were "the last thing I wanted to hear as someone about to marry". These included detailed discussions over what constitutes divorce in Islamic law and what rights the spouses had "against" each other. Particularly shocking for them was the frequent reference to the "Islamic right" of the husband to enter into a polygamous relationship. Her relatives were equally shocked when informed of these experiences, and her parents stressed that this is not how Indian Muslims conceived of marriage. Similar experiences with other couples led Mr Sameer to appeal to his Indian Muslim association to conduct their own "marriage course" for its members. A practicing female psychologist within their community

and an Indian Muslim Islamic scholar was employed for this course. Having conducted two such courses over two years for those members "approaching the age of marriage", he described how the emphasis here was on their "traditional values" of marriage as an avenue to bring families together – rather than two individuals. Divorce and polygamy take on "completely" different connotations in such conceptions according to him, whereby the emphasis is always towards privileging family relations over those between individuals. The breakup of a marriage or engaging in polygyny thus comes with stigmas that affect the future relations between families within the community. The practice of marriage here was being articulated as a mode of reinforcing communal relations, juxtaposed to Malay conceptions that are apparently based upon individual desires.

Imaginations of belonging were perhaps most intensely articulated around the issue of "unmarried" women, which was detailed in the final section of the previous chapter. It was shown that there was a conflict between practices of gender segregation within their communal/domestic spaces and the educational/employment settings of the country, where gender interactions were described as more "liberal". A manifestation of such conflicting relations was illustrated in universities, where Indian Muslim students of the opposite genders were often reluctant in initiating interactions with each other. This reluctance did not necessarily arise with the opposite gender of other ethnicities, particularly with Malays. Such dynamics were described in the previous chapter as resulting in Indian Muslim men often being more acquainted with Malay women, rather than with women from their community. This was "exacerbated", according to Mrs Rasiya, by Indian Muslim women opting to enrol for further education as a means of delaying familial pressure to marry, while men were often pressured to enter the family business or seek gainful employment rather than opt for further studies. A consequence frequently articulated was that Indian Muslim men were increasingly marrying Malay women, while it became difficult to find "appropriate" spouses for Indian Muslim

women. Men marrying Malay women were taken with apprehension, such families would gradually assimilate with the majority Malay population and become distant from the community. On the other hand, a growing number of unmarried Indian Muslim women invoked a sense of anxiety over the future of the community. Yet, the fact that all Indian Muslim communities share this anxiety has ironically resulted in an increasing acceptance among them. While intra-community marriages had been rare earlier, arranged marriages between them have increased drastically according to Mrs Rasiya. She lays down this openness and acceptance to the common worry and shared anxiety over the future of their communities. Ritualization as a frame is observed here in the shifting articulations of proprieties attached to acceptable candidates for the practice of arranged marriages. Social relations are framed in the context of marriage within the country, and conceptions of boundedness are reimagined by extending the circle of potential spouses to other Indian Muslim communities.

Belonging From Place to Person via Temporal Narratives

Questions on belonging were naturally at the forefront initially during my fieldwork among such marginal diasporic communities. But since I had not yet theoretically connected them to the notion of time, my retrospectively naïve probes over these issues to my interlocutors often elicited vague, ambiguous or even confused responses. It also gradually dawned upon me that it was not simply a matter of getting my questions right, but that I had to concurrently seek interlocutors who were skillful in orienting me into their temporalities –through words, emotions or senses. 'Coevalness' as a skill here was twofold. It began from intersubjective relationships among the communities and wider society, with temporalities developing through deeper and wider relationships. This intersubjectivity then had to be extended to me in our interactions so that they do not end up being displaced out of their temporalities (Birth, 2008, p. 18). Mr Nisham was one such key person, and in a revealing meeting reflected the following:

"You see Waseem, there are three types of Indian Muslims. The first says that we have to become Malays because that is the best way forward for us in the country. The second argues that we will never be completely accepted as Malays, and we should rather be proud of our Indian Muslim culture. Then there are a few who claim that we should throw away such race-talk and become Malaysians".

In subsequent meetings with other interlocutors, citing this anecdote provoked agreement, contestation or further reflection on their part. Most tried to place themselves amongst one or the other, while some changed the emphasis by arguing that it is less a matter of choice and more of being moulded or conditioned by the place. These discussions were my prime avenue to glean the multiple temporalities operating among my interlocutors. It was here in particular that I extensively employed the method of person-centred ethnography outlined in chapter two, whereby key interlocutors were sought out and engaged with in face-to-face conversations. Keen attention was paid to their employment of the pronouns "we" and "us" in these conversations, and to the concurrent emotions and senses exuded or implied. Temporality as engagements in imaginations of belonging became a contested terrain that hinged on conceptions of the past, present and future. The ethnography thereby revealed multiple temporalities based upon permutations of such diverse imaginations of the past and future. These permutations are illustrated below by juxtaposing contrasting temporal imaginations along a common theme. Persons thus emerge in these illustrations through conceptions of place and time.

Temporalities of Trade

Mr Ali and Mr Hyder both run a chain of restaurants in Malaysia. They foresee the immense potential for growth in the restaurant sector, given the increasing urbanization that creates a constant supply of customers who tend to eat outside. Most of their customers are Malays who visit these restaurants for food that is *Halal*, appetizing and economical. Mr Ali is an Indian

citizen, with his wife and children having been based in India during my fieldwork. His business depends on the margins gained through the trust accrued from employing his extended family. This also provides him with a certain level of prestige back in India as a person providing employment opportunities to his fellow natives. While he has a permanent residency permit in the country, he has no plans to take up citizenship. Rather, his long-term goal is to gradually hand over an established business to his sons and retire back to India – just like his father and grandfather did. He is actively involved in social activities in his native town in India, raising donations and funds for projects there, and providing support to those who come to Malaysia. He is fluent in Malay, but his social interactions with Malaysians beyond Indian Muslims are primarily oriented to the business as patrons, suppliers or bureaucrats. Belonging in Malaysia, in a sense, is temporary for him – yet filled with hope. This hope, arising from generational experiences of enterprising in the country and a confident forecast over its future, is frequently contrasted with a bleak perception of economic opportunities in India. Nevertheless, India figures prominently as a place for home and return in his imagination.

Mr Hyder, on the other hand, is a Malaysian citizen, who was born in the country. He runs a prominent Indian Muslim restaurant that his grandfather had begun. Most of his extended family members have migrated to Malaysia and very few remain in their ancestral village. Malaysia is home for him, and he prefers to have as little to do with India as possible. While the business has become established, familial issues that frequently crop up over its management have become a vexing burden. He was thus gradually attempting to disentangle the family from the business by incorporating more "modern" modes of administration. He remains aloof from Indian Muslim circles and had encouraged his son (who was involved in the business) to marry outside their community. But while Mr Hyder had married a Malay woman after the demise of his first wife, he does not see himself as being entrenched with the Malay population. The Indian Muslim identity is important for him as far as it provides a mode

of authenticity to the restaurant. The optimism of Mr Ali over the future of the business stands in contrast to the weight of the present for Mr Hyder in the form of an expanding family that is dependent on the business.

Imaginations of Femininity

Mrs Rasiya and Mrs Hafiza are two Indian Muslim women who were keenly involved in Indian Muslim activities, and particularly concerned about women. Mrs Rasiya is a reputed matchmaker, with a good network across Indian Muslim communities. Indian Muslims for her had made a "comfortable" space for themselves, but being "culturally" distinct from Malays and other Indians meant that they can never "completely assimilate". Yet, despite their prosperity, the plight of unmarried Indian Muslim women was an issue arising from the Malaysian context. While Indian Muslim men were increasingly marrying Malay women, Indian Muslim women today were unduly privileging education and employment over the obligations they have towards the domestic domain. As a result, she foresee broken families and alienated women unless the communities take "necessary measures". The temporality disclosed in these articulations was of trepidation regarding the future of Indian Muslim households, despite the economic and social progress the communities have made in the country. During a particularly vulnerable conversation, she revealed how this trepidation could be due to her personal experiences of delaying her marriage for seeking education and then subsequently being unable to find a partner until the age of thirty-five. The anxiety that plagued her and her family was being increasingly witnessed among other Indian Muslims. The solution for her was to re-privilege the comforts of a "stable" domestic space and feminine authority therein, to belong as Indian Muslims.

Mrs Hafiza, on the other hand, did not express such trepidations over Indian Muslim domestic spaces. Rather, she was intensely concerned with the socio-political "progress" of Indian Muslims. Indians for her were a distinct "civilization" from the Malays and Chinese, but Islam

was a vital element in this civilization that engendered a particular Indian Muslim culture. It was unfortunate for her that the allure of state patronage was pushing Indian Muslims to assimilate with the majority Malay population. As a response, she works with Indian Muslim organizations and groups towards their welfare – but importantly, for their "cultural pride". She runs a popular blog that documents prominent Indian Muslims and was writing a book about such Indian Muslim personalities during my fieldwork. In particular, she focuses on Indian Muslim women and their "upliftment" – by promoting their academic, entrepreneurial and historical achievements. Belonging in these articulations was often imagined through notions of public representation, with a particular attempt to locate feminine power beyond the domestic space. Temporal imagination through the revival of female domestic authority by Mrs Rasiya is contrasted here with Mrs Hafiza's advocacy of female upliftment from domestic enclosure.

Immediacy of the Present

Haji Shabeer and Mr Yacob are two interlocutors who expressed urgency over the present. Both valued the pasts of their communities, and both saw potential as Muslims in the country. Despite that, the present for them was a critical time. There are increasing social pressures on the communities to assimilate with the majority Malays, yet there are better possibilities if their communities mobilize "appropriately". This often implied taking "strong decisions" and having "unpopular opinions". Mr Yacob is from the Malabari community in Johor, and has seen their progression from working in rubber plantations to being urban settlers. While many in his community increasingly desire to "become Malays" by "erasing" their pasts, Mr Yacob is sceptical of the possibility of being completely accepted as Malays by the majority. Rather, he sees potential in the fact that they share the same Islamic heritage of the *Shafi* school of law and traditional *Sufi* forms of spirituality – unlike most other Indian Muslims. He thus works on building networks with their native scholars back in India to pursue alliances with the

traditional scholars and spiritual leaders among Malays. Through such links, he managed to accrue many privileges for his *Madrasa*, as a means of "reviving" his community through the inculcation of their sensibilities – which were illustrated in chapter four. Belonging through such activities is directed at carving out a communal space as Malabaris, but these often come at the cost of taking independent decisions that occasionally make him unpopular among his community.

Haji Shabeer, on the other hand, hails from Ramanathapuram that still have strong links to India. His temporal imaginations are thus equally concerned about India and its social contexts. Rather than with religious leaders, his interactions are more with political activists and social leaders from both countries. In particular, he strives for Muslim unity across national borders, particularly between Malaysia and India. He thus engages Malays in charity drives back in India and instigates awareness of Islamophobia in India among Malaysians. He is also deeply involved in community work, particularly by promoting sentiments that are crucial for family businesses. In this vein, he acts as a matchmaker within his community and involves himself in social and educational programs to that end. He is keenly aware that such expansive engagements would undoubtedly imply disagreements over specific details with others, but he rarely compromises on his principles which often makes him an unpopular figure. Yet the urgency of the present, like with Mr Yacob, motivates him to return to the welfare of his community. Belonging is thus not indexed to a particular geographical place for him but imagined through constant engagements along concentric circles of social and political groups.

Parental Nostalgia

Mr Usman and Mr Ubaid are both highly educated and were employed in respectable professions. They hail from different communities who they each claim had dominated Indian Muslim trade in the country until the 1980s. Most of them subsequently returned to India, while the remaining few in Malaysia like them have predominantly moved away from the business.

The highly active "community life" they had during their childhood in Malaysia was claimed to be missing for their children, given that very few of them remain in the country. While they still frequently visit their native towns in India, the children claim to be more attached to the Malaysian social environment. As a result, the narratives about the "heydays" of their communities were permeated with a sense of nostalgia. Mr Usman's response is to revive those "heydays" through community works and historical documentation among Malabaris in the country, although most of them have distinct migration histories to his community. He engages with them in reviving the Malayalam language among them, translated certain heritage works into Malay for them, and designed a website that documents the history and culture of Malabaris. Although these efforts take up a significant amount of his time and energy, the privilege of having a community for his children is what essentially drives him – without which he feels they would end up being socially excluded. The nostalgic impulse for him imbues the past with symbolic weight, yet this motivates him to work for a future that would have an inclusive space for his children.

Mr Ubaid, on the other hand, is extremely pessimistic about the future of his children. Hailing from the Tanjavur community that is dwindling in the country, he already foresees their "gradual assimilation" into Malaysia. Having grown up in Malaysia, they never picked up on the Tamil language, as English was the spoken language at home. They see the ritual visits to India as a "chore" and do not particularly fraternize with the other members of their community in Malaysia. Mr Ubaid is also personally not keen on socializing with the other Indian Muslim communities, particularly the more recently migrated traders, whom he feels are not "cultured enough". While he and his wife want to return to India after he retires, their children are against the prospect of settling permanently in India. Belonging is thus a contested terrain in his family and one which is saturated with a sense of melancholy in his imagination.

Pan-Malaysian Imaginations

Haji Abu and Ramli are two interlocutors who are particularly intent on distancing themselves from Indian Muslim social circles. This is not due to any aversion they have towards these communities, nor do they try to hide their Indian Muslim roots. Rather, both in different ways claim to be more committed to a "Malaysian" imagination and identification. Invoking an Indian Muslim identity in Malaysia's racialized setting is not only reactionary according to them but would also be counterproductive to Indian Muslims by further secluding themselves as an insignificant minority. Haji Abu is a retired civil servant of high rank and was engaged in the publishing industry during my fieldwork. For him, Malaysia as an "Islamic nation" provides an opportunity to evoke Islam as the prime identifier to unite all Muslims, while simultaneously enabling engagements and dialogues with non-Muslims. He faults the racial labels that have become entangled with religions for creating racial tensions in Malaysia. He is thus equally opposed to the conflation of the Malay ethnicity with Islam, expressed by him through his indifference to being fluent in Malay despite having been in the country for more than sixty years. Rather, it is through English that he engages in multi-faith relations. He has published books on comparative religion; as well as on the history of Islam in India and China as a response to the conflation of Malay ethnicity and Islam. While he is still well connected to his hometown in India, he did not inculcate such relations among his children – whom he rather raised to be particularly engaged in the Malaysian social and political context. His belonging in Malaysia is thus primarily as a Muslim. Temporal imaginations were thus fused with a sense of potentiality, one that is rooted not in place or ethnicity, but in Islam.

Ramli, on the other hand, considers himself "secular" and "not particularly religious". Born to immigrant parents who did not have many kin members in the country, Ramli was raised among Malays and Indians who were economically struggling. During his graduation, he became "politically involved against the status quo", having observed the deployment of racial

categories in the country for political gains. He thus began to conceive of a "pan-Malaysian" politics that was inclusive of racial and religious differences. Yet he soon realized that Indian Muslims had not been "adequately engaged with" by political parties, and saw a "potential" for political mobilization among them. He initiated engagements with Indian Muslim organizations, promoted political interactions with them and sought affiliations with other groups. Temporal imagination was thus rooted in the place of Malaysia, conceived through political strategy and racial unity. Being an Indian Muslim was thus only circumstantial in this sense of belonging that is indexed to the "progress" of the nation.

Chapter VII: Personhood Encoded

Introduction

Personhood was presented in the first two chapters as the overarching concept of the research. Despite this, the ethnographic illustrations in the subsequent four chapters did not directly grapple with personhood. Rather, the ethnography indicated the concept or merely alluded to it. I maintained an interpretative distance in these chapters to avoid imposing the concept on the reader. This chapter now contextualises these ethnographic chapters around personhood by bringing the body and social relations to the foreground. But what does personhood refer to? Derived from the term person, it inhabits a field of similar concepts like identity, self, individual or agent. As with any abstract concept, its utility often lies not in precise definitions, but in its capacity to open up explorations or inquiries (Strathern M., 2018, p. 237). The term person is etymologically linked to the notion of a theatrical mask (*persona*) that is either granted to or adopted by a subject.

In anthropology, persons are understood to be socially engendered through attributes conferred on them, which may be in the form of status, role or moral capacity. Personhood as an analytical category involves the juxtaposition of the concept of person to the self, the latter concerned with internal reflexive awareness of a subject[99]. When explored as a distinctly human phenomenon, personhood involves the interplay between the attributions that make a person and the processes involved in its internalization. As one definition puts it, it is "the emergent form of the self as it develops within a context of social relations" (Ingold, 1994, p. 744); or "the attainment of physiological, psychological and social competence as it is defined by a given culture" (Appell-Warren, 1988, p. 6). Personhood is thus processual and entails a

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[99] This distinction makes particular sense in the context of persons without a self, like legally designated persons like corporations, certain holy deities, or even rivers and mountains; and of person-less selves, for instance illegitimate offspring in certain social contexts, or slaves in other.

capacity for action that is enmeshed in social relations, these actions being influenced by diffused ideas of what a person ought to be.

The popularity of the term person in anthropology is usually laid down to an influential essay by Marcel Mauss, first published in 1938 in French (Mauss, 1985). In an evolutionist vein typical of his time, Mauss traces the "modern" understanding of the person from a primitive notion of '*personage*' based on awareness of one's status within a collective, through Greko-Roman '*persona*' where this awareness combines with a sense of possessing rights as individuals, to a Christianity-influenced moral person (*personne*) that is attributed with conscience and a unique immortal soul. From this arises a bounded notion of the self (*moi*) as the locus of consciousness, one that provided the European Enlightenment with its foundation for human reason. By delineating a specific genealogy for what he considered a shared European tradition, Mauss intended to put forward the concept of the person as a means to explore such dynamics across civilizations and cultures. Each society is assumed to have concurrent notions over the person based on its form of social organisation and different cultural markers.

Meyer Fortes subsequently developed the concept of personhood through an ethnographic account of Tallensi ritual practices, although he eschewed Mauss' evolutionary paradigm. Fortes distinguished between 'objective' and 'subjective' aspects of personhood and thereby linked the person with the self. He argued that a subject is not simply a recipient or bearer of attributes, but also one who has to internalize them. The 'objective' aspect involves the qualities, capacities and roles that society confers on a person; while the 'subjective' involves the awareness of social expectations that arise from this conferment (Fortes, 1987). Personhood in this sense may in some traditions be conferred upon the birth of an individual and may cease to be one upon death. In others, persons are rather continuously made through social actions, and this need not be limited to the lifespan of the subject. Levi-Strauss posited ritual actions as

the dominant mode through which 'archaic societies' conceived personhood in this way, wherein momentary sameness is created among persons out of underlying differences (Schattschneider, 2021).

Personhood in this sense has been a key concept in anthropology, even if it may not be explicitly articulated. But it was particularly in kinship studies that the term gained more traction. Degnen argues that this was a reaction to the structuralist erasure of the human in kinship studies, to which personhood provided a means of bringing together topics that used to be discussed separately, particularly feminism (Degnen, 2018). At this intersection, Marylin Strathern's work on personhood in Melanesia proved to be particularly influential. Drawing from McKim Marriot's studies on personhood in India, she developed 'dividual' models of personhood through the paradigm of gift transactions introduced by Mauss (Strathern M., 1988)[100]. Strathern argued that Melanesian forms of gift exchanges privilege the creation of social relations that engender a distinct type of 'sociality'. Relations here are not the by-product of personal interactions but are activated or made to appear in exchanges that provide the basis for differentiating themselves (Strathern M., 1992, p. 125).

Melanesian sociality thus conveys a "relational matrix" that generates and sustains persons (Lebner, 2017, p. 11). Being enmeshed in such a matrix where relations delineate divisions between persons renders a Melanesian "dividual"[101]. In contrast, a different form of sociality

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[100] In his classic study "*The Gift*" (Mauss, 2002), Mauss analysed the aspect of "prestation" in societies where contracts take the form of gift exchanges. These gifts may appear voluntary but are in fact given and repaid under obligation. The process of gift thus involves giving, receiving and reciprocating. There are also different types of gifts, some of which are unilateral (from superior to inferior), tributary (from inferior to superior), competitive (between equals) and agonistic (communal/transcendent).

[101] Strathern's writing has developed considerably over the years. She theorizes the possibility of how analogy can take on an extremely subtle difference to that adopted in "Western" thinking, whereby difference is not the same as dissimilarity. While analogy in English parlance instantiates similarity by connecting "dissimilar entities through a relation of similarity perceived between them", Strathern asks us to imagine the possibility of relations instantiating difference. Taking Kuma exogamy pattern as an example, the relation between a male person and his brother-in-law from another clan is based on the disjunction created at marriage whereby each differentiate himself from the other, but *differently* through a common woman (Strathern M., 2020, p. 115).

emerges when commodity rather than gift becomes the dominant mode of exchange. In such 'individual' models of personhood that sanctify the bounded self, relations appear as an epiphenomenal link between already disjunct persons. The term 'society' is but one derivation of such relations that heavily organizes the thinking of 'Western' social scientists – whereby persons are parts of the whole but distinct from the relations that bring them together. Much of Strathern's work has been dedicated to recovering the ground extruded by such analyses (Munro, 2005, p. 245), attempting to rethink relations without reifying society or the individual. Persons conceptualized here do not exist prior to their relations, rather it is their relational capacity that engenders sociality and personhood.

This chapter draws on this strand of thinking on relations to expound on the concept of personhood among my interlocutors. But instead of the Maussian paradigm of gift transactions adopted by Marilyn Strathern, I draw on another aspect of Mauss – that of the "techniques of the body" (Mauss, 1973, p. 75). Mauss attempted to think of the body as "man's primary technical instrument" in this work (ibid). A technical action does not necessitate an external instrument (consider 'techniques' of dancing or martial arts). And even in the presence of an external instrument, certain bodily movements have to be learned for its performance. Mauss extends this line of thinking on techniques to different proprieties attached to mundane actions of the body across different cultures – diffused 'habits' of walking, eating, sleeping, swimming, etc. Humans are explored as *having* a body and knowing how to use it, rather than simply being a body. A technique is thus defined by Mauss as any action that is "effective and traditional" (ibid) – a tradition here implies its transmission between humans through various means. Ethnographers are thus confronted with "assemblages of series of (technical) actions" in humans that are "more or less habitual", in many ways because they are "assembled by and for social authority" (Mauss, 1973, p. 85). He then goes on to indicate the importance of breathing techniques linked to mystical states in certain traditions and forms of prayer that are rooted in

the body to foreground bodily actions in social analyses that were hitherto relegated to the miscellaneous.

Mauss appears not to have synthesized his studies on the body and the person (both of which were based on lectures delivered over a period of three years). While techniques of the body explored how persons in different cultures learn how to use their body by emphasizing the social aspects of the unconscious, the study on the person shifted the focus to ideas of consciousness across different cultures and timespans. Andrew Strathern argues though that the notion of 'habitus' provides an underlying link between these works (Strathern A. , 1996, p. 12). For Mauss, habitus is derived from the capacity for developing body techniques which link the conscious and the unconscious domains of human acts. I consider the notion of tradition as also a link in this sense between the body and the person – habitus being more manifest spatially, while tradition reflects aspects of temporality. Through these links, this chapter analyses the body as the locus of personhood and as a site for its expression. Emotions and senses are posited as two techniques that my interlocutors singled out for cultural attention. The proprieties attached to these techniques, being rooted in the body, serve to substantiate and symbolize personhood for them.

Through such a 'technical' rendering of emotions and senses, the central theme of this chapter revolves around the processes involved in the 'personification' of the body. Beyond a conception of emotions and senses emerging experientially from the body, the focus shifts to what happens between persons through the acquisition and deployment of such techniques. It is here that relations come to the fore in the exposition of personhood. Mauss' oeuvre provides another key to establishing a link. In a short lecture before his article on techniques of the body, Mauss argued that the presence of a technique allows us to derive a 'technology', in the sense of its *logos* or underlying logic (Mauss, 2006). I argue that relations can be delineated as a form of technology in this sense – the technology of sociality for my interlocutors, and a technology

of description for my ethnography (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017, p. 120). Beyond simply being a property of the body, emotions and senses can thereby be illustrated as taking on relational capabilities and complexities through which we can analyse cultural forms. The chapter thus progresses from the body to relations and then finally arrives at the person. The methodological aspects are first brought to the fore to demarcate the field and reflect upon the milieu detailed in the previous ethnographic chapters. I then move on to explore emotions and senses as techniques of the body through which forms of social relations can be ethnographically gauged. From these, relation as a category is subsequently posited as a mode of technology that discloses the contours of habitus and tradition. These then provide an avenue to delve into the intricacies of personhood revealed through such 'technicalities' of body and relations among Indian Muslims in Malaysia.

Demarcating the Milieu

The previous chapters presented a plethora of concepts and terms in my ethnographic narrative. Emotions, senses, space, time or ritual became a means of organizing my ethnographic encounters with Indian Muslims in Malaysia. But during such encounters, it became apparent early on that the social category of "Indian Muslim" that I have singled out to explore was not as homogenously conceived by them as I initially presumed. The collective invocation of being Indian Muslims in Malaysia crucially depended on migratory patterns, which subsequently led me to demarcate between sentiment communities and sensibility communities in the previous chapters. The underlying commonality that bound together their diffuse set of attachments and connections was a shared sense of "origin" in India and the religion of Islam. Raised as a diasporic Indian myself, my immersion into their lifeworld gradually became a reflective attempt to understand the similarities and differences between my experiences and theirs. But while this reflexivity was alluded to in chapter two, it was restrained in the subsequent

ethnographic chapters in order to privilege my interlocutors in the narrative. An effect was that my ethnographic writing only derivatively explained the cultural unity of a "diasporic milieu" (Hage, 2021) among the two sets of communities[102]. I now attempt a brief reflexive engagement with this milieu, precisely because it had an overriding influence over my ethnographic observations. Specifically, I reflect on the reasons why certain aspects caught my intrigue and subsequently grabbed my analytical attention. Through such reflections, the milieu thus becomes predicated on my relationality to diasporic states of being revealed by my interlocutors.

Migration was the first theme that garnered my curiosity – an element that I shared with my interlocutors. The study of migration in anthropology has tended to move away from economically determined analysis of "push and pull" forces ostensibly engendered by capitalism. While an economic logic may persist in collective migrations, a key focus in these studies is on the cultural contexts engendered by such movements – particularly the effects that patterns of migration have on the forms of sociality among migrant communities. It was here in particular that the similarities and differences between my experiences and those of my interlocutors were striking. Raised in Saudi Arabia by migrant parents from India, my childhood sociality was largely circumscribed around the many thousands of other Indian families that had migrated to the Saudi nation. With the rapid expansion in the country based on the oil boom post-1970, most Indian migrants were "white collar" workers employed in an economy dominated by the dictates of the oil industry (Al-Rasheed, 2010). For these family

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[102] Hage argues that studies on diaspora and transnationalism tend to focus on differentiating processes – either from the perspective of migrants or the host population/state– that lead to generic depictions of migrants as suffering subjects or a problematic object. While not downplaying their utility, Hage raises the need for an exploration of the cultural unity of diasporic experiences that grant us a "milieu" from which we may analyse diasporic states of being/consciousness (Hage, 2021, p.10). This chapter follows in this direction of analysis, but instead of his approach of beginning from persons and groups to arrive at their "total diasporic reality" or milieu, my approach is the other way around. My ethnography becomes a means of delineating the milieu in order to arrive at forms of personhood embedded within them.

migrations, the relocation was conceived for a limited time, after which there was always an intention to return to India. On the other hand, it was shown earlier that there were two migration patterns among Indian Muslims in Malaysia. For the sentiment communities, their movements are historically linked to a tradition of entrepreneurship that has prevailed along the Bay of Bengal for at least a few centuries. Generations of men migrated from India to Malay lands for enterprising, while the women and children were largely based in India. This began to change at the beginning of the 21st century when families increasingly contemplated settling in Malaysia. As for the sensibility communities, their migration during the early 20th century was precipitated by economic hardship and involved family migrations with no possibilities conceived of a return.

I gradually began to realize that these different patterns of migration have engendered contrasting forms of diasporic consciousness[103]. For the diasporic milieu I had inhabited, the notion of an eventual return to India was very strong primarily because there were no prospects of obtaining citizenship or permanent residency in Saudi Arabia for expatriate populations. As a result, considerable collective efforts were directed at maintaining strong connections with the native land, traditions and cultures. This precipitated strong social segregation for us in Saudi Arabia – in cultural activities, religious events, or even playing football. Indian families enrolled their children in an education system based on Indian curricula. Annual visits to our "homeland" during school vacations became a form of ritual or pilgrimage, and engagements in activities that were deemed 'cultural' were much stronger amongst us than those back in India. There was thus a comparatively broader 'pan-Indian' consciousness amongst these

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[103] A commonly accepted definition of diaspora is that of Tololyan, who delineates it as revolving around the movement or expulsion of a group of people from their designated homeland, followed by settlement in foreign host places. They develop a propensity to maintain a distinct collective identity from the hosts. These may be supplemented with efforts to retain contact with those in their homeland and others who are similarly dispersed, as well as harbouring desires to return (Tölölyan, 2007, p. 648).

communities than our kin back in India, whose familiarities were often confined to their local contexts.

In contrast, my intrigue with my interlocutors in Malaysia was primarily with the absence of this desire or anxiety over an impending and eventual return to India. Although most of the sentiment communities still maintain familial and kin links in India, they have brought over their immediate families to Malaysia today and foresee permanent residence. For sensibility communities, there are hardly any kin relations back in India and most of them have no tangible connection with India as a place today. Although these interlocutors frequently expressed a desire to maintain a collective identity distinct from the majority Malay Muslims and the predominantly non-Muslim Indians, this desire was predicated on a future imagined in Malaysia. Such initial intrigues raised a few questions. Why do the parents complain that the children were losing their culture and becoming Malays when they persist in sending them to Malay public schools? Why do they decry a general lack of connection to their native places when they rarely take their families to visit these places in India? These questions arose in me from being grounded in a different diasporic milieu. As a result, belonging as a notion became central to my research, which was explored in the previous chapter. From this came the realization that different trajectories of migration gave rise to manifold strategies of settlement beyond a binary of assimilation or segregation. Migration becomes more than a simple movement of people across space, but also a form of imagining that is mobilized and structured by desires and anxieties (Fortier, 2012, p. 31).

It is at this intersection that the concept of transnationalism has gained traction in the anthropology of migration and diaspora. Studies in this field tend to emphasize an analytical distinction between transnational processes of movement and diasporic forms of consciousness. They attempt to go beyond the dynamics and logic of assimilation by attending to other modes of cultural reproduction like syncretism, hybridity and creole formations. The

notion of diaspora becomes an aspect of consciousness, as an "imagined connection between a post-migration population and a place of origin" (Vertovec, 2004, p. 282). This line of thought has criticized a tendency in earlier studies of migration to take ethnic groups as self-evident units of observation and analysis, often assuming the coincidence of community, ethnicity and culture in these units (Dahinden, 2012, p. 123). Assimilation or integration often becomes reduced to an ideology of the 'melting pot', while pluralism can end up being an argument for the structural or cultural persistence of ethnic groups (Kivisto, 2001, p. 554). Instead, these studies ushered me to explore the domestic domain in chapter five as an analytical space where such relations and categories were upheld, contested or ruptured. It was in these spaces that more subtle forms of belonging and attachments were invoked. Overlapping identities of race/ethnicity, locality, family, religion and class were more visibly negotiated and maintained in these spaces.

However, transnationalism can also reveal the existence of global spaces beyond the logic of migration or diasporic consciousness. Islam in this sense emerged as a transnational space of normative reference and legitimacy (Bowen, 2004, p. 879). Both I and my interlocutors shared a sense of being in an Islamic/Muslim country where being a Muslim could momentarily sideline differences and hierarchies. This would be pronounced during shared rituals – particularly that of the daily prayer and the month of fasting. This Islamic environment we found ourselves in meant that our Muslim practices and identities were unreflexively espoused in many ways. Rather, it would be on our visits to India that our "minority status" would be markedly visible to us. Yet such similarities between our milieus were conjoined with deeply-lying differences – particularly with the contrasting social and political contexts. While Saudi Arabia claims to be a country based on Islamic values and principles, the social and political contexts are maintained through hierarchies created over genealogical and tribal affiliations that subsume other considerations (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Citizenship is reserved predominantly

for bloodlines and very rarely (if ever) obtained for non-Arabs. Despite this, I do not recall my parents ever raising a complaint over this as a form of discrimination. Rather, the opposite was more frequently articulated of it being an advantage. The fact that their offspring could never completely belong to the foreign land ensured for them that there would always remain a sense of belonging with their native land and kin in India.

In contrast, there were many avenues and possibilities for Indian Muslims in Malaysia to become citizens, and even be considered ethnically Malay due to being Muslims. Loyalties and affiliations were thus frequently invoked towards their adopted nation, as illustrated in the previous chapters. Yet these brought about ambivalences that a particular generation or two found disconcerting in some cases – particularly concerning what they considered as their traditions and cultures. Many community leaders felt they were fighting a losing battle against the assimilation of future generations into the majority Malay population. Others expressed concerns over the prospect that Indian Muslims would never be completely accepted as Malays. In all these, India as a place of origin was accorded far less significance than that exhibited during my childhood. It was primarily the Islamic environment that most of my interlocutors appealed to as a reason for feeling comfortable in the country. My interlocutors and I shared a sense of being diasporic Muslims in Muslim nations, but the shared similarity made the differences more pronounced for me.

Islam in this sense took on a central aspect in my research. With regard to anthropology, a dominant strand of research on Islam has developed over the writings of Talal Asad, whose works have argued for exploring Islam as a 'discursive tradition' (Asad, 1986a). Secularity is posited in his works as an overriding aspect of the modern condition – an expanding domain of sociality that distinguishes itself from those that it designates as religious (Asad, 2003). Illuminating studies have emerged on how this effect the topology of Islam in postcolonial contexts. Asad's works have focused on the genealogy of concepts like religion and human

rights (Asad, 1993) and pain (Asad, 2003) to argue against disembodied conceptions of personhood engendered by secular/liberal ideologies of the West. Subsequent authors have taken up these studies to ethnographically explore Islam through the notion of 'self-cultivation' as a counterpoint to Western sensibilities. Yet in my ethnography, 'discursive traditions' did not adequately capture the dynamics of such sensibilities. While these studies often rightly highlight the making and perpetuation of 'ethical selves', my encounters pushed me in a different direction of practices that are more concerned with collective boundaries and diasporic homemaking. Echoing Mittermeier, such paradigms of self-cultivation risked erasing other modes of religiosity that valorise being acted upon (Mittermaier, 2012, p. 250) – modes that do not privilege a bounded self. Concerning personhood, these studies revealed much about the forensic aspects of persons, but little about the mimetic[104]. The prominence attached to emotions and senses among my interlocutors foregrounded their capacities to collectively inculcate sentiments and sensibilities among each other. I began to explore these capacities as bodily techniques that reproduce particular forms of sociality. Islam here took on a dimension of collective belonging that sought to decouple or blur the entanglement of religions and ethnicities in the country. This prominence of the bodily and relational eventually convinced me that personhood can provide an overarching concept through which to bring together emotions, senses, space and time as illustrated in the previous four chapters. The next section thus explores emotions and senses as bodily techniques that reproduce and mediate social relations among Indian Muslims in Malaysia.

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[104] This distinction will be discussed in the final section of the chapter.

Techniques and Body

This section brings emotions and senses into the purview of the 'body'. While this was already done in the initial sections of chapters three and four on emotions and senses respectively, the aim here is to develop them into a Maussian notion of bodily 'techniques'. This is not merely by treating the body as an object, but as the material and existential ground for the melding of person and self (Csordas, 1994). Lambek and Andrew Strathern argue that the growing interest in the notion of the body is primarily motivated by an interest in the domain of lived experience and the effects of the social realm on the human body (Lambek & Strathern, 1998, p. 5). In this sense, I focus here on what happens between such bodies as a means of locating subjectivity concerning emotions and senses beyond the confines of a "transcendent Cartesian" mind, one that is abstracted from social relations (Turner, 1995, p. 168). I argue that personhood can only be grasped if the body is explored in thought and practice, which would reveal the encoding of memory in somatized forms and the role of the body in building cultural forms. The body thus serves to substantiate personhood.

Emotions as Technique

Chapter three explored the social lives of Indian Muslim entrepreneurs in Malaysia through certain sentiments gleaned from their business practices. These sentiments were taken as second-order emotions that are articulated, anticipated and reflected upon in social interactions – emotions being "unified experiences" that combine bodily feelings with cognition. Beatty argues that emotions are best explored through a narrative approach that provides "deep" descriptions of emotional episodes, where sentiments become forms of explaining, predicting, and judging (Beatty, 2014, p. 559). Sentiments during my fieldwork though were disclosed through persistent observation of recurring activities that reveal their operation at a level where feeling and cognition are fuzzily combined. The exchange and reciprocation of sentiments in

interactions engender and sustain social relations, providing an illustrative means of grasping relations that are significant in the formation of personhood.

I now examine this conception with the existing literature on emotions in anthropology to consider the possibilities of emotions being a body technique. Some of the earliest studies that directly engaged the topic are those of the Culture and Personality theorists. These studies posited certain basic emotions as universal[105]. Other emotions are complex derivations of these, cultural processes providing particular textures to such emotions in each culture. Nonetheless, those outside these cultures are still believed to have the capacity to empathize with these emotions. The succeeding interpretative school of anthropology increasingly argued in favour of the authority of culture over feeling, with different authors taking on variable levels of constructivist positions. Geertz argued that the Balinese only project emotions externally and do not have internal feelings like Westerners (Geertz, 1966). Briggs argued that the Inuit do not have a sense of anger in their culture, rather this emotion is either repressed or rationally curbed (Briggs, 1970).

Subsequent studies began to argue that emotions are best analysed through language and power, rather than as an internal sensation linked to an ostensive Western ideology of bounded personhood. This strong constructivist position on emotions resulted in a move away from psychologizing tendencies, and towards locating them in the politics and discourses of daily life. Michelle Rosaldo argued that emotions for the Ilongots of the Philippines are embodied thoughts - "thoughts somehow felt"- that give a sense of involvement for a subject (Rosaldo M. , 1984, p. 143). Lutz argued that the Ifaluk notion of *fago* – purportedly about sharing and compassion – takes on dimensions of power and hierarchy in the act of generous giving (Lutz,

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[105] The actual number of these basic emotions varied across authors. The typical ones were joy, sadness, anger, and fear. These may be complemented by bodily mechanisms of appraisal and responses to emotions, but these were typically considered to be biological and hence outside the purview of cultural analysis.

1988). Emotions are instances where the body is aroused through cognitive assessments of situations mediated by power and language. But this has been criticized for substituting culturally generic actors as in Geertz, for actors who end up being politically generic. Emotions become reduced to either an expression of authority or a protest against it (Beatty, 2009). These theorists were criticized for ignoring the autonomy of emotions in humans – drives, repressions and ambiguities, along with variations in their intensity and force (Rosaldo R. , 1983).

Nevertheless, the ethnographic validity of all these studies, despite the shortcomings in their perspectives, raised a genuine question of what accounts for such differences in emotions across cultures. Beatty has argued that cultures may vary to the extent that certain feelings are 'emotionalized' or granted cultural complexity. They may also vary based on different notions of personhood and the concomitant forms of relations (Beatty, 2009). Sentiments were introduced in chapter three among one set of Indian Muslim communities through such conceptions. Although these interlocutors never articulated or indicated emotions as a distinct domain of experience, the ethnography illustrated certain sentiments that they singled out for cultural attention. While these sentiments were not designated with particular terminologies, they were illustrated in chapter three as modes of action and ways of relating with others. In this continuous and almost habituated reiteration of such sentiments amongst themselves, they can even become disconnected from feelings. They become as 'naturalized' as ways of walking or eating – a technique of the body *à la* Mauss. But even more critically, they are observably inculcated from a young age and hence traditional, a condition that Mauss had emphasized was crucial for an act to be considered a technique. Domestic practices outlined in chapter five revealed how emotions and feelings are employed to inculcate such sentiments among them – particularly in child-rearing. Emotions and sentiments are stabilized in children here by producing particular feelings in them. This extends to adults as well, where traditional hierarchies and authorities articulate and uphold proprieties through emotions. The drive for

migration and enterprising, the desire for arranged marriages, and a sense of thriftiness derived from anxiety over spending on oneself are all sentiments socially inculcated in this sense. Emotions thus become knowledge encoded in particular ways – a technique since they are habituated as well as learnt. This is now illustrated below through a particular anecdote.

<u>The Case of the Shoulder Pouch</u>

On a late Tuesday night in January 2020, I sat waiting for Farhan at a *Mamak* restaurant, who had asked to meet up for dinner. Farhan had been my colleague at the Malaysian university, enrolled by his parents there to break out of the family business and become an engineer. But he always had a fascination for enterprising and was the first interlocutor to show me around Indian Muslim markets in Kuala Lumpur. I vividly recall his portrayal of some of those Indian Muslim entrepreneurs as "real men" who garnered respect from their communities, despite their "simple" appearance and disregard for fame. They were contrasted by him to "shallow" corporate professionals, whom his family was forcing him to be. It was thus no surprise when I returned for fieldwork that he had decided to be involved in the family business. Back in the restaurant, he emerged two hours later than expected accompanied by a beaming smile and a friend. He immediately asked if I noticed anything different about him. I pointed to a shoulder pouch strapped to his chest, my silence expressing an annoyance at his unpunctuality. Irritated by my lack of enthusiasm, he asked me if I knew what his new pouch represented and playfully reproached me for my ignorance. "This pouch is a responsibility, it's a job promotion for me". His father had delegated to him the duty of collecting the daily cash reserves from all the branches, and it was a proud moment that disclosed the family's trust in him. His friend teasingly interrupted – "You should see how scared he was to carry around so much money! He asked me to go along with him and didn't relax until all the money was handed over to his father". "Why are you still wearing it then", I asked. "To show off", the friend interrupted

again, "maybe it will get him a good wife ('*nalla ponnu*') if people see it on him". We all laughed and began ordering our food as Farhan declared that dinner was on him.

This anecdote captures different layers of emotions among these interlocutors. Farhan was brought up in Malaysia in a household that was tightly connected with other households from their community. These interactions, wherein the familial often overlapped with the economic, were grounded upon the inculcation and circulation of emotions. Farhan and his father rarely spoke to each other as an inculcated sentiment of respect and authority respectively. This was habituated from childhood through domestic practices but persisted even during my fieldwork when Farhan was in his mid-twenties. He was never laid back or overtly cheerful in the presence of his father, and would only speak to him with reverence. His father would use very few words with him, and I never saw intimate discussions between them despite being engaged in the same business. But his father's delegation of duty was interpreted by Farhan as an expression of confidence in him – emotions becoming simultaneously a mode of practice and communication. This pride quickly changed to trepidation when confronted with the task, as his friend sardonically described. The long-desired responsibility was met with initial self-doubt, showing us that such sentiments may also be accompanied by ambivalent feelings. While emotions may be programmatically used to inculcate sentiments in others, they are also autonomous to a degree in persons and may vary in intensity.

Emotions also reveal the constitution of social relations – the hierarchies of age and gender being particularly visible here. Farhan's earlier desire to join the family business was not directly conveyed to his father, as he was hesitant to go against the family's wish for him to be an engineer. But this wish was persistently articulated to his mother, as boys were more inclined to express their vulnerabilities and desires to their mothers in these communities. And in typical fashion, it was his mother who eventually relayed this wish to his father and persuaded him. Yet in a community where gender interactions beyond one's immediate household are highly

regulated, his friend's joke indicated how eligibility for marriage can be communicated through a shoulder pouch that represented a 'responsible' person. It would be inappropriate here for Farhan to signal his desire for marriage directly to a woman or an elder in the community. Rather these are mediated by elders who pick on such signals as the shoulder pouch bestowed by a family. This is knowledge encoded in a particular way that he and his friend clearly grasped. The anecdote illustrates how sentiments, singled out for cultural attention, are both learnt as well as unreflectively performed such that they may even be disconnected from immediate feelings. It is at this level that emotions parallel techniques as habituated practices, primarily because they are granted cultural attention by these communities. Emotions thus take on a form of bodily technique through which social relations are established and sustained, as well as a technique for disciplining and inculcating appropriate emotions in others.

Senses as Technique

The sensorium was analysed in chapter four as a site for cultural attention among a set of Indian Muslim communities. The chapter illustrated how the senses are a vital medium for "cultural elaboration" in their lives (Howes, 2003, p. xi), such that what they described as their cultures became a mode of sensing the world to me. The aim was to illustrate the capacities of the senses to be "sedimented" (Connerton, 1989, p. 72) in persons as sensibilities, materializing themselves through a shared and cultivated sensorium. This section aims to conceive of sense perception as a technique of the body. The anthropology of senses today is largely split into two camps based on its approaches, owing primarily to a continuing debate between two of its proponents in David Howes and Tim Ingold. Howes argues for an approach that begins from the 'social' significance attached to sense experiences to arrive at a "sensory profile" of the collective (Howes & Classen, 1991, p. 257). Sensations are largely experienced and evaluated by persons through shared/received cultural categories in this approach. These approaches have looked at culture in terms of the organisation of the sensorium – the hierarchical ordering of

the senses, the privilege attached to a particular mode of sensation, or the possibility of other modalities of senses. The task of ethnography in these studies is to analyze the cultural variations in sensory experiences. The aim here may be to explore the meanings and emphases attached to different sense modalities (Stoller, 1989); or as a means of locating cultural differences by attending to the process of perception through which values are internalized (Geurts, 2003). In this vein, Sutton has demonstrated how collective memories are invested in food practices (Sutton, 2001). Seremetakis has looked at how sensory memories may be attached to materials and artefacts that produce affective states in persons (Seremetakis, 1996).

The other approach, based on a critique of the first, argues for beginning from embodied perceptions of the world that are discursively constructed and creatively experienced (Ingold, 2000, p. 285). Sensations here are akin to "skills of action and perception" (Ingold, 2011, p. 314), which can be 'learned' by an ethnographer to explore how humans inhabit the world differently. Sarah Pink has picked up on this to explore how ethnography can become a means of emplacement (Pink, 2009, p. 47). Although they come prior, one can consider the works of Csordas on charismatic healing experiences (Csordas, 1994) or Jackson's studies on corporeality among Kuranko of Sierra Leone (Jackson, 1989) as aligning with such conceptions.

While the first approach engenders a risk of projecting bounded cultures that can blur the fluidities of collective sensibilities, the second approach risks privileging those sensory experiences that are immediate, over those that are collectively enacted and transmitted. My use of the term sensibility in chapter four was to combine the approach of beginning from the collective while paying attention to how discursive evocations of these affect the person's perceptions of the world. While Ingold has posited the term skill as a means of capturing such a bodily dimension, Howes has recently laid out the argument that the term technique captures

this dimension more appropriately (Howes, 2022). The section now delves into an anecdote from the field in order to build this proposition.

Sedimented Bodies

Shafika was a senior Malabari in Johor, a jovial and outgoing person who showed a keen interest in my research. He took me to his house for dinner one day and gradually began to open up about his life. Born to immigrant parents who had fled from their native land in Kerala due to severe unrest and civil strife, they sailed precariously over the Indian Ocean with other Malabaris like them and ended up in rubber plantations in Johor. Subsequently, his father had conveyed the dangers and violence that were rampant in his native to his children – advising them that they should never go there. Instead, they should make Malaysia their home and their future around fellow Malabaris like them. Shafika though grew up among a generation of Malabaris who held an intrigue or fascination about Kerala as their land of 'origin'. The *Ustads* who used to come from these places would rectify the misconceptions of his father's generations. Kerala had become a thriving and vibrant place, a land filled with people just like them.

When his father approached the final stages of his life, he gradually began to harbour a desire to see his native place again. Given his ill health and difficulty to walk, Shafika decided that his wife and children will accompany his parents to Kerala. The *Ustads* gave them a few contacts who they said might be able to help them, but his father was adamant that no help from strangers should be sought. The place was dangerous, he claimed, and people would kill even for small change. They landed in Kerala and took a train to their native place which had developed into a large city. Upon returning to his home town after more than fifty years, his father kept refusing the fact that they were in the right place. For three days, the family stayed in a hotel while Shafika went around the town to inquire about the house or potential relatives. He only had the name of his ancestral house and the names of his grandparents to go by, but

no one in the city seemed to know them. His father kept bickering that his son had brought him to the wrong place, and the collective frustration ended up in frequent arguments within the family. By the third day, the family had given up hope and requested a taxi to the nearest airport. On the way, Shafika explained their predicament to the driver, who inquired if they have more information to go with. Despite his mistrust of the people in the city, the father reluctantly disclosed that the house used to be nearby a large paddy field beside a red hill. The driver could not recall such a place but said that paddy fields used to be on the outskirts of the town earlier. He agreed to take them there, but the road led them to a dead-end – an uninhabited wild place with no signs of a red hill or housing. Shafika wandered around the place hoping to find a lead, but could only find a child in the distance. He called out to the child and inquired if there are any houses around, to which he replied that there is one behind the trees – although a car cannot pass through. Shafika beckoned his family and they followed the child through the woods. His father walked with difficulty by leaning on him, but once they were past a few trees, he suddenly exclaimed to everyone to hold still. He slowly took off his slippers and felt the ground with his bare feet. He then suddenly began pacing ahead of everyone as if he had no difficulty. He took a few turns in the woods while everyone else hurried behind him, and then suddenly stood motionless in front of a dilapidated house. The house happened to be that of the child, who went in and informed his mother that a few people were outside. Shafika's father informed the woman that he had grown up in the house. They then learnt that the lady was his nephew's wife. The father sat down quietly at the entrance, overwhelmed by the situation (Shafika was sobbing uncontrollably when relating this to me). The nephew came after a while, confronted by an uncle of whom he had only heard and had no knowledge of his whereabouts. Amidst these emotional scenes, Shafika's wife summoned him inside the house to show him the nephew's daughter who looked exactly like theirs. A sense of disequilibrium was how Shafika described his shock – an abrupt displacement in space and time. A weird

feeling of being the same person as his nephew, of having lived in this derelict house his entire life.

Shafika's riveting narrative had more to offer that day, but I stop here to delve into the subject of the senses. During this account, I was particularly struck by the incident of his father feeling the earth with his bare feet. A few days later, well after his emotional state had subsided, I inquired over what he made of the incident. He had asked his father about this, who responded that the sudden synesthetic exposure to the surrounding – the sights, sounds and smells – brought an intuitive realization of having arrived. Yet he claimed that his feet had more recollection of the land than his fading eyes. The story in chapter four of Mr Yacob hearing the sound of women washing clothes has a few parallels to this – the arrival of particular sensations in the body giving an intuitive sense of familiarity. Both Shafika and Mr Yacob alluded to these sensations being sedimented in the body as a particular type of memory. Such Proustian recollections, of *re*membering long-forgotten memories, engendered strong dispositions towards the community for these persons. The disequilibrium that Shafika described upon seeing his daughter's doppelganger take on striking metaphorical allusions to their collective migration – an uncertainty-filled migration of a community to an alien land that brought instability into their collective lives. Yet the memory of their native land and culture remained sedimented in the body as sensorium, even if much of it escaped consciousness. What remained at the conscious level collectively was the desire to inculcate this sensorium to the next generations through traditions that were overtly sensorial. The particular foods that are constantly tasted, the tonality of songs and prayers frequently chanted, or even a sense of beauty attached to possessing a 'big nose' are privileged by the elders of the community in the face of pressures to assimilate with the majority Malay Muslims in the country. These can appear unsavoury or bland to even some of the later generations within the community, until moments of 'disequilibrium' pull them back into privileging such sensorial practices. It is not simply the

arrival of particular sensations into a generic body that triggers these sensibilities, rather these bodies have been cultivated with 'sensibilities' such that the arrival of particular sensations engenders dispositions towards the community. The senses thus conceived take on the Maussian notion of technique of the body – of being "effective and traditional" for the inculcation of a collective sensorium.

Relations as Technology

The previous section established the possibility of emotions and senses rising from modes of experiences to forms of bodily techniques. This section posits relations as a mediating technology between such habituated techniques and conscious forms of personhood. Relations are analysed here through the ethnography of space and time illustrated in chapters five and six respectively, where space and time were argued to be properties of social relations. Technology here is based on the Maussian sense of it being a *logos* or an underlying logic for techniques. This arguably aligns with the standard definition in social studies of technology by Daniel Miller – "as the range of methods used in order to produce patterned variation" (Miller, 1987, p. 201). In this sense, relations are posited in this chapter as a technology of sociality[106]. The intricacies of this technology are explored in this section through the notions of habitus and tradition. Habitus allows us to elaborate on the 'acquisition' of bodily techniques within domestic spaces illustrated in chapter five. The notion of tradition, on the other hand, explores the 'transmission' of these acquired techniques by linking them to temporalities illustrated in chapter six. In this progression from the acquisition of techniques in space to its transmission

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[106] By deriving a "technology" of social relations from bodily techniques, a central issue within the anthropology of technology is bypassed. This refers to the critique of the "modern separation of society and technology" (Ingold, 1997, p. 107), whereby the development of technology is disembedded from social life. The challenge then of re-embedding technical relations in social relations becomes redundant or tautological in my case.

in time, the scale of relations shifts from the observable body in the previous section to an abstract level here. At this scale, it becomes easier to acknowledge that relations concurrently become a technology of ethnographic description for me (Holbraad & Pedersen, 2017, p. 120). This is not to concede to a relativizing scheme, but to leave an interpretative space for the reader when deploying analogies and comparisons at this abstract level. Habitus and tradition are thus a comparative means of describing and stabilizing these abstractions.

Habitus

The term habitus today is indelibly linked in social sciences to the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu provided a sophisticated account of practical knowledge among social actors through habitus as "the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices" (Bourdieu, 1979, p. vii). Bourdieu's elaboration of the term was motivated by an underlying question – why do the vast majority of social habits persist in humans or resist change? In this regard, his conception has proved to be remarkably illuminating in social analysis. The common objection raised against it - that it does not explain social change – thus appears to me to be unfounded. In my case though, the focus on relations implies that I have to equally attend to transformations in modes of being and knowing. For this, I return to Mauss from whom Bourdieu had derived the term, although I follow Bourdieu in emphasising the spatial dimensions of habitus (Noble & Watkins, 2003, p. 525). Mauss had broadly identified habitus as the capacity for developing bodily techniques – the refinement of techniques until they become naturalized in the body. There is a place for consciousness in Mauss' conception that Bourdieu had effectively side-lined (Mead, 2016, p. 2), which allows us to better account for deficiencies or failures in the acquisition of these techniques[107]. An implication is that transformations or generative forces need not be located "outside the immediate, lived reality

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[107] Such possibilities within Mauss' notion of techniques of the body has been convincingly elaborated upon by Noland (Noland 2009, 39).

of lifeworlds" as in Bourdieu (Jackson, 1996, p. 21). Rather, these transformations can be located in bodily experiences as well, which will be spatially illustrated in this section.

Chapter five conceptualized space as a "property of social relationships" (Jimenez, 2003, p. 140). Relations unfold spatially, and not in a predesignated space. From this, I provided an ethnography of domestic spaces among Indian Muslims. The domestic was not confined to the physical place of the house but extended to relations that are connected to home-making. The ethnography moved through four themes–familiarity, continuity, ambiguity and rupture–four different tones of these domestic relations. These inter-domestic relations were their largest sphere of sociality; which was illustrated through their tendency to live as extended families in houses, or in their preference to live in close proximity to such kin. Familial interactions were primarily concentrated among those from the same native localities in India, or with those from the same associations or clubs. Beyond such proxemics, familiarities were linked to emotions and senses within these domestic spaces. The tongue was illustrated as a site of familiarity through the authenticities attached to taste and the articulation of intimacies in their mother tongue. This extended to the spatiality of meals as gendered in their production and performance. Asif's mother's qualms that her grandchildren would not be "raised properly" if Asif moved into a separate house, implying that they would not be properly fed, were indicative of the spatiality of habitus in these relations. The kinesthetics involved in gender interactions between parents, siblings, cousins and extended kin were also strongly articulated as modes of familiarity. The presence of an outsider within these spaces would bring about shifts. Fahad's complaint that he "did not feel at home as a groom" when living with his wife's family was illustrative of this, as was my presence as an outsider during meals that resulted in the men and women being segregated.

The acquisition of these bodily techniques was sustained by embedding interactions among persons moulded by such spaces. The second tone of continuity alluded to this, where the

ethnography focused on ceremonies as extensions of the domestic. Ceremonies attached to birth, marriage and death were articulated as affirming their commitment to upholding such spaces. Marriage was the most intensely engaged aspect in this sense. Perhaps this was most perceptible in the practice of choosing a spouse from India in order to "preserve" their domestic space. The intricacies of matchmaking that women engaged in within these communities were also linked to this continuity. This involved predisposing persons to prefer arranged marriages over choosing their spouses, as well as engaging in marriage negotiations between families to promote particular alliances through such marriages. These 'matchmakers' were quick to articulate their works as being motivated for upholding these domestic spaces for the next generation of Indian Muslims in the country. Habitus can thus be perceived as the spatial acquisition of sentiments and sensibilities laid out in chapters three and four respectively.

Yet, the process of acquiring these techniques can falter – as was illustrated in moments of ambiguity and rupture. My earlier argument for a degree of autonomy of feelings and sensations in humans gives rise to the possibility that the habitus may not be uniformly developed among persons. The consciousness of one's bodily actions can often conflict with the mandates of the habitus, leading to ambivalence, subversion or non-conformity. The conflicts between duty and desire concerning labor, between engaging in the family business or seeking sustenance elsewhere, and the challenges of parenting are examples of when inculcated sentiments and sensibilities may be detached from actual feelings and sensations. Moments of rupture heighten this sense, particularly in cases of 'love marriages' outside the community or in instances of divorce. These ruptures were also conceived during failures of the family business that induced a rethinking of traditional forms of financing, or the "issue" of the growing number of unmarried women in their communities that motivated Mrs Rasiya to argue for relaxing norms related to gender interactions among teenagers within their community.

The domestic space in these sentiments and sensibilities was thus conceived as an enclosure for the feminine that is simultaneously restrictive and enabling. It is a space of privacy for women where men are granted limited access. And it is from these spaces that women engage themselves in upholding the proprieties and authenticities attached to emotions, tastes, body postures and gender interactions – habitus in the form of acquisition of bodily techniques. These are to a large degree shared across Indian households and Muslim cultures, including the household I grew up in. But these spaces take on particular political undertones in the Indian Muslim diasporic context where relations outside this sphere are perceived as being dominated by an 'assimilationist' logic of the Islamic nation. These relations will be expanded upon later by linking the notion of habitus to tradition. It is thus to the notion of tradition as the transmission of bodily techniques that we now move on to.

Tradition

In Mauss' exposition of body techniques, he defines a technique as "an action which is effective and traditional", and goes on to comment that it cannot exist "in the absence of a tradition" (Mauss, 1973, p. 75). If habitus for Mauss explained the acquisition of bodily techniques, I argue that tradition for Mauss is concerned with the transmission of techniques across time – although the analytical distinction between them is unclear from his writing. Temporality was explored in chapter six through acts and imaginations of belonging that my interlocutors engaged in. Bureaucracy and ritual were employed as frames that disclosed their analogous capacities to stimulate imaginations of boundedness or collective simultaneity in time. The chapter ethnographically examined this imagination of collective simultaneity as indeterminate – consisting of entangled and often conflicting temporalities within a nation, community, and possibly within a single person as well. Bureaucratization and ritualization here were perceived as framing diverse temporal notions of belonging, either through inclusion or exclusion. Both these frames sought to explain the shifting or stable articulations that certain practices took on

among my interlocutors. Bureaucratization betrayed the effects of Islam being intimately tied to the Malay ethnicity in the country, while ritualization became conceived as a response to this bureaucratization. I now focus on ritualization as a form of transmission of these techniques, from which outlines of tradition can be gleaned.

Chapter six illustrated how bureaucratic privileging of the Malay language brought about anxieties over the communities losing grasp of their mother tongues. These stimulated the ritualization of certain practices. Children from the sentiment communities were often enrolled at schools in India primarily to familiarize them with their mother tongues. Malabari *Madrasas* were shown to be institutionalized for the transmission of 'authentic' sensations mediated by the *Ustads* from India. Both these practices involved an intent to discipline the children through the transmission of emotions or sensations. Other practices were more oriented at representation – like reproducing their mother tongues in public spaces through speeches or songs during public events and ceremonies. The chapter then moved on to the second theme of 'patronage' as the circulation of wealth and privilege which induce expectations from the state or the community. The bureaucratization of state privileges and support systems could result in persons downplaying the support provided by the family or community. As a response, these communities engaged in practices that sought to inculcate sustenance within their community. The circulation of cash reserves among the entrepreneurs in the sentiment communities was articulated as a means of circumventing banks and other financial intermediaries in order to discipline an ethic of saving and accumulation. Other practices involved charity drives and support mechanisms for those within the communities. And finally, marriage was articulated as a mode of reinforcing communal relations, juxtaposed to 'Malay' conceptions that are apparently based upon individual desires. Children were disciplined to desire arranged marriages and for prioritizing the family over the individual. But the increasing cases of 'unmarried' Indian Muslim women invoked a sense of anxiety over the future of their

community. Ritualization as a frame was illustrated here in the shifting articulations and proprieties attached to acceptable candidates for arranged marriages.

Two modes of transmitting bodily techniques are legible here – discipline and representation. Yet the efficacy of these transmissions was influenced by certain temporal conceptions of the communities' past, present and future. Chapter six illustrated how hope, nostalgia, irony or pragmatism dictate how the present in a tradition can be heterogeneously linked to the past and future. The 'transitory' migration of Mr Ali to Malaysia is filled with hope arising from generational experiences of enterprising in the country, which motivates him to discipline his children to engage in the family business. This optimism of Mr Ali stands in contrast to Mr Hyder, for whom an expanding family in Malaysia that is dependent on the business induced him to discourage his son from joining the enterprise. The disciplining of sentiments attached to family businesses varies here based on the perception of the future. In another instance, trepidation regarding the future of Indian Muslim households pushed Mrs Rasiya to argue for re-privileging the comforts of a "stable" domestic space and feminine authority therein. Mrs Hafiza, on the other hand, saw matters otherwise. Feminine belonging was imagined through notions of public representation, with a particular attempt to locate their power beyond the domestic space. The disciplining of Indian Muslim women for the revival of female domestic authority by Mrs Rasiya contrasts with Mrs Hafiza's advocacy of female representation for their upliftment from domestic enclosure.

For the pragmatism of Haji Shabeer and Mr Yacob though, it is the present that is more vigorously re-imagined. The present for them is a critical time that had immense possibilities if their communities mobilize "appropriately". For Mr Yacob, this involved carving out a communal space as Malabaris in the country by invoking certain representative aspects of Islam. On the other hand, Haji Shabeer strives for political alliances between Malaysia and India through disciplinary aspects of collective mobilization linked to Islam. For Mr Usman

and Mr Ubaid rather, it was the nostalgic recollections of the past that propelled their imagination. Mr Usman's response is to revive the "heydays" through the historical documentation of Malabaris in the country. Such representative acts make no sense for Mr Ubaid, whose imagination is saturated with a sense of melancholy and a bleak forecast over the future of his community in Malaysia. Tradition as the transmission of bodily techniques thus takes on different shades and intensities.

It is from such expositions of habitus and tradition linked to bodily techniques that outlines of the 'person' and the 'self' can be ethnographically revealed. The successful acquisition and transmission of these techniques indicate social conceptions of what a person ought to be, while moments of ambiguity or ambivalences disclose a subjective self who is aware of discrepancies between inculcated techniques and actual feelings or sensations. This need not be the only means by which the 'person' and the 'self' rise to a certain level of consciousness. But such awareness of the 'person' and the 'self' is always mediated by such social relations, and it is only through these relations that its awareness is sustained. Relations thus act as the technological link between body and personhood here. In the case of my interlocutors for whom certain bodily techniques are privileged for the inculcation of personhood, the tendency is to displace the awareness of subjective dimensions of certain emotions and senses. "This is what *I* am supposed to feel/sense" or "this is how *you* are expected to be". These emotions and senses, stabilized in the form of sentiments and sensibilities, reproduce particular social relationships among them. Yet reproducing such relations lead to a certain level of reflexivity about these sentiments and sensibilities, and it is here that relations ethnographically indicate forms of consciousness. While the social aspect of the body was sought by rendering emotions and senses as techniques, its relational manifestations in space and time direct us to the possibility that such bodily dispositions can itself be a form of consciousness that inform social life. Bodily awareness leads us to 'embodied' consciousness 'codified' in a particular way.

This notion of codification and 'code' allows us to contend with personhood among Indian Muslims in Malaysia.

The Code of Personhood

As explained earlier, personhood as an analytical category involves the interplay between the attributions that make a person and the processes involved in its internalization by a self. While Mauss has been credited for popularizing the term in social sciences in the 20th century, personhood was extensively discussed before this in philosophy, theology, medicine and law. Explorations of personhood tended to approach it through two types of questions – metaphysical and/or practical. The metaphysical question sought to explore *what* constitutes a person – delving into themes like body, soul, rationality or consciousness. The practical question looked into *how* such persons are formed through modes of communication, exchange or other forms of interaction. The former ascribes attributes or capacities to humans while the latter tends to assign them a status. An enduring dualism characterized these discussions – from body/soul in Christian scholastic theology to body/mind in European Enlightenment philosophy, up to individual/society in modern social sciences. Subsequent to Mauss' publication on the topic, anthropology has approached personhood either as a social category that delineates a set of possible social roles, statuses, rights and obligations; or based on cultural beliefs over what constitutes a person (McHugh, 1989, p. 77). While Meyer Fortes' illustration of personhood among Tallensi can be considered within the first category (Fortes, 1987), the second theme can be seen in McKim Marriot's argument for a distinct 'Hindu' conception of person as "dividual" (Marriott, 1977). In line with Luis Dumont's studies of hierarchy in India, this dividual person is a composition of transferable particles – coded substances that are permeable, divisible and transmissible. This fusion was in contrast to Schneider's distinction between substance (nature) and code (law) based on the opposition of consanguinity to affinity

in kinship studies (Schneider, 1980). Unlike the Western "individual", the "dividual" emphasized an indigenous holistic logic of the person based on a notion of "code-substance" that does not distinguish between mind and body.

In contrast to the many critiques that have questioned this sharp distinction between Western "individualism" and Indian "holism" in Marriot, Schram has argued that Marriot is not so much engaging in a particular theory of the person but more so in building a new method of understanding persons. Marylin Strathern's works also come under this impulse, particularly in going beyond the individual-society dichotomy. For Marriot and Strathern, as with Mauss, Indians and Melanesians are no less aware of their individuality than Western selves. But they explore the possibility of significant differences in how these selves relate to others to engender a different form of sociality. Personhood is explored not through essential attributes, but through the flow of relations that come analytically prior to a person. Dividual is thus an alternative way that subjects might analyze their own social lives and elicit relations from others (Schram, 2015, pp. 319-321). Strathern specifically attempts to recover insights that dissolve when 'society' is employed as the predominant metaphor for social organisation. Society is typically taken as the totality of social relations, and persons are those who engage in its making. "Individual" persons thus conceive of themselves as existing in society and then subsequently engaging in relations, which gives the impression that relations are post-facto of personhood. On the other hand, her interlocutors in Melanesia did not conceive of relations as a linking mechanism but rather held themselves to be enmeshed within relations. Relations are activated or made to appear through social interactions, which provide them with a sense of difference and individuality (Strathern M. , 1992, p. 125). Relations are thus analytically prior to persons, their relational capacity being prior to their individuality.

My research has followed this tradition of exploring personhood. I began with the notion of the 'body' as the paradigm for analysing social relations. Specifically, emotions and senses

provided me with an avenue to explore interactions between bodies as the locus of experience that engenders particular forms of sociality[108]. This move from the body to relations allows me to posit the body as the site of personhood – evoking Andrew Strathern and Lambek's dialectic of embodiment of persons and personification of bodies (Lambek & Strathern, 1998). Rendering emotions and senses as 'techniques' thus links the Maussian understandings of the body and the person that they call for. I have argued earlier that these techniques of the body were condensed by my interlocutors into a 'code' – emotions and senses were codified into sentiments and sensibilities respectively. These were a form of knowledge that they were intimately conscious of in their social actions. Yet consciousness engendered through such culturally elaborated emotions and senses is much more embodied, and not solely cognized in an abstract 'mind'. Sentiments and sensibilities are not in the form of an explicit set of operational principles ingrained in the mind that the body sets out to do[109]. Meaning is not simply an intention that is translated into action by persons. Rather, it is realized in social relations through shared awareness of what an act entails and who such an actor thereby is. Persons enmeshed in such relations are categorized according to their ability to anticipate such intentions and meanings generated from a sequence of actions. Sentiments and sensibilities are thus particular ways of eliciting relations and making them visible.

This raises certain ethical implications concerning consciousness and agency among such persons. In an article on ethics, Lambek suggests that there are two universal and intrinsic

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[108] It has to be pointed out here that I am subsuming many of the functions and experiences that my interlocutors would typically locate within the soul into that of the body. Anthropology has yet to develop sophisticated understandings of the soul that are not intimately tied to European traditions of Christianity, which brings up complications with regard to translation. Islamic notions of *Nafs* or *Ruh* or Indian notions of A*atma/Aatmav* do enter the discourses of my interlocutors, but these need not be satisfactorily captured by the English notion of the soul. This is not necessarily the case with the notion of the body, which has been extensively engaged with in anthropology such that translatory discrepancies can be more reflectively mitigated.

[109] Ingold has criticized the "Cartesian supposition" prevalent in earlier technological studies where the body sets out to do what is fashioned in the mind – implying that action follows thought (Ingold, 1997, p. 110). An extension of this thinking is that every technique presupposes a technology, assumed to be written in "civilized" societies, and engraved in the "mind" for oral societies.

dimensions of the person – forensic and mimetic. The former involves a unique and continuous actor and a cumulative set of acts to which she is held and holds herself accountable. Identity, responsibility and intentionality are unitary in this dimension of the person. On the other hand, the mimetic dimension is discontinuous, dispersed and uncontained; wherein a subject draws from a set of personae that they momentarily inhabit, personify, imitate or impersonate. Based on his studies of spirit possession, Lambek argues that different societies provide a variety of means and opportunities for such mimetic discontinuities. He goes on to claim that both dimensions are intrinsic to ethical life (Lambek, 2013). In the case of my interlocutors who valorize a sense of being acted upon emotionally or sensually, this dichotomy of consciousness as continuous and discontinuous becomes complicated. The discontinuous dimension is not exactly restricted to temporary ritual mimesis but can be much more sustained through emotional and sensuous episodes illustrated in previous chapters. The sensory experiences of Shafika and his father in India are a case in point. Similarly, the forensic subject need not be entirely characterized by her own actions that she is accountable for. The deep entanglements of the family and the business among the sentiment communities are a testament to such diffused accountability. At least with my interlocutors, it is difficult to locate agency among such unbounded subjects. In this vein, Asad has argued that consciousness is inadequate to account for agency, as for him instinctual/unconscious side of the person works more pervasively and continuously than consciousness does (Asad, 1993, p. 15). My approach here is to shift the notion of consciousness from a sense of 'intentional' thinking directed at an act or object to one that is considerably more embodied through emotions and senses. Embodiment is not the translation of ideas into the body but the very idea itself. Such a cultured body becomes capable of reflecting on itself and defining distinct emotions and sensations. More importantly, it valorizes the arrival of particular emotions and sensations into the body. The body thus provides a particular way through which techniques are codified.

But if the body is the site of personhood, why is 'code' privileged over the more biological/material 'substance'? After all, it is commonsensical notions of biological birth or "blood relations" that provide an immediate sense of who a person is. I now move on to a deeper set of relations in order to explain this de-emphasis of substantive modes in defining personhood among my interlocutors – particularly invocations of race or ethnicity typically observed among diasporic communities today. These relations are predicated on political discourses described in chapter one that associate Islam and Hinduism with Malay and Indian 'race' respectively. As such, personhood takes on distinct outlines here that reveal their sociality being embedded in a broader scale of political/discursive relations.

Relations in an Islamic Nation and Secular State

Studies on personhood in India have tended to emphasize the notion of substance based on Schneider's distinction between codes and substances in kinship studies[110]. Janet Carsten has also pushed her explorations of 'relatedness' in Malaysia in the direction of substances – particularly the centrality of bodily fluids in conceptions of kinship (Carsten, 1995). In this sense, it is noteworthy that my interlocutors rarely invoked such notions, particularly given how discourses on social life in Malaysia are racially/ethnically coloured that easily lend to substantive articulations of personhood. I argue that it is precisely these official/popular discourses that push my interlocutors to avoid such substantive claims. In his classic study of a multi-ethnic London suburb of Southall, Baumann illustrated how an official discourse that

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[110] Although McKim Marriot's classic study alluded to earlier combined them into "substance-codes", it highlighted the transmission of substances between bodies and castes in the formation of his "dividual" person. Cecelia Busby's studies on personhood among a Christian fishing community in South India extended this argument by claiming that substances are not exactly extracted in this transmission, but rather extended through its flow between bodies. Hence her argument for the "permeable" person (Busby, 1997). Sarah Lamb explored the notion of maya among Bengali villagers in North India, which constituted shared bodily substances and the emotional/affective connections they engender among persons. These were argued to increase in volume and intensity throughout one's life course, but such substances work differently among genders and are also often actively loosened or taken apart by actors (Lamb, 2014). Valentine Daniel placed substance primarily in the notion of "*Ur*" among Tamil persons that stress the prominence attached to native land and soil in the formation of persons (Daniel, 1984).

provided formal recognition to five "communities" resulted in the population having to navigate along such markers. Thus, local politics is forced to play out along such identifications, even though general social interactions among the population undermine or negate these classifications (Baumann, 1996). There are parallels here with Malaysia, where the official discourse links Islam with the Malay race while the Indian is associated with Hinduism. Being Muslims but of Indian race, my interlocutors thus have to navigate along such discourses of race and religion, for which I have illustrated their response in the form of 'codification' of emotions and senses. But the prominence they attach to Islam cannot completely explain their privileging of the mode of code in defining personhood. For instance, there are other ethnic minority Muslims in Malaysia who visibly invoke racial modes of differentiation – the *Hadrami* Arabs being a prominent example[111]. An enduring issue that persisted during my fieldwork was to theoretically locate practices of differentiation among Indian Muslims that is ethnographically perceptible but difficult to outline conceptually. Neither race nor religion comprehensively captured these dynamics among Indian Muslims.

My approach here has been to follow Marilyn Strathern in circumventing such established boundaries that often provide readymade descriptions of "society". Social boundaries are not taken to be divisions that actually exist, but ones that are rather collectively displayed (Munro, 2005, p. 263). The focus on the person provides a means of shifting the scale of relations between the singular subject and the social collective in a relational matrix that generates and sustains such persons (Lebner, 2017, p. 11). For this, I followed Mauss in locating the motor for social action in bodily experience rather than collective representations, linguistic structures or unconscious drives (Noland, 2010, p. 43). Such explorations of space and time gave a better

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[111] While Sumit Mandal's recent historical study of Hadrami Arabs in Southeast Asia focused predominantly on Dutch Java, he has shown how a syncretic form of racial identification can emerge from creole Muslims who claim descent from Yemen (Mandal, 2018). Similarly, two studies have explored Chinese Muslims in Malaysia (Wu, 2015) (Weng, 2018), but more research on such dynamics is needed before such comparative claims can be made on them.

illustration of how they navigate, circumvent or undermine these official categories. Perhaps this was most perceptible in the preference of the vast majority of Indian Muslims to maintain social relations with Malays in the country, even though it is from Malays that they often culturally differentiated themselves. Such relations are not visibly sought out with the substantial number of non-Muslim Indians in the country, even though most of them share the same mother tongue of Tamil. The task before me was to connect such negotiations of state-engendered classifications with aspects of personhood.

An influential approach in anthropology today is to explore such relations through the notion of secularity as a modern phenomenon. Rather than analyze the negotiations of fixed political identities, this approach seeks to examine the conceptual grammars that provide grounds for such political negotiations of power and identity. Talal Asad has argued that secularism as a political project is a site from which modern secular personhood is defined[112], a "forensic" person conceived as the "integration of a single subject with a continuous consciousness in a single body" (Asad, 2003, p. 74). In other words, a person is a bounded individual who is accountable to herself and the state. Asad argues that the attribution of this essence to persons in European political and legal theories was crucial for the redefinition of religion as an aspect of private belief. Through such ideas, Asad attempted to provide a genealogy of the 'secular'. Lebner has cautioned that subsequent studies that drew on Asad have tended to occlude his main insight that the secular precedes and exceeds the 'state' (Lebner, 2015). Secularity is not the rise of unbelief, but the expansion of a domain that distinguishes itself from "religion" and attempts to regulate it by delineating distinct domains like society, politics and economy.

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[112] Asad makes an analytical distinction between secular and secularism. The secular – a set of "concepts, practices and sensibilities" (Asad, 2003, p.16) with its origins in European Enlightenment – is conceptually prior to secularism as a political doctrine.

Yet, the fact that the secular can only be grasped in relation to religion implies that its contours are ever-shifting (Hirschkind, 2011). Julie Mcbrein argues that secularism in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet nations of Central Asia did not predicate religion on liberal notions of a privatized 'belief'. Rather, religion was wrapped up with communal/national forms of "belonging" such that it was the only ground from which religion can be invoked (McBrien, 2017, p. 9). Parallels can be observed in Malaysia, where Islam as the official religion is intimately tied to the Malay race. Yet beyond a sense of ethnic classification for regulation of the population, the state apparatuses in Malaysia have actively employed Islam as a means of social transformation of the majority Malay ethnic population along secular notions of development and progress[113]. It is here that the negotiations of my interlocutors appear to us as a form of collective mobilization within the grounds provided by the secular regime. The cultural attention given to emotions and senses is thus a means of blurring the entanglements of race and religion without actively resisting them. It was related in chapter three that the majority of those in sentiment communities avoided state patronage in the form of economic/financial benefits for Muslims because they claimed that these would make them passive "like Malays". This can be re-interpreted as a form of mobilizing their community through disciplinary practices linked to entrepreneurship that ensure motivation in the family business, rather than be subjected to state forms of economic discipline imposed on Malay Muslims. The insistence by Malabaris on maintaining their own *Madrasas* distinct from state institutions (despite having no credal or practical differences concerning what is taught about

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[113] This raises an interesting question of whether secularism in Malaysia remains committed to the disciplining of the forensic and bounded individual. At least in the domain of marriage, most Indian Muslims I interacted with would describe urban Malay marriage practices as "liberal" or "Western-influenced", implying the ostensive privilege given to individual choice/desire over that of the family. But the vast majority of the Indian Muslim entrepreneurs would argue against Malays being forensic when it comes to entrepreneurship, claiming that their supposed dependence on state handouts have made them less "self-accountable" and less motivated. More research is needed on secularity in Malaysia in this regard, but it is crucial to note Lebner's insight here that the transformative powers of secularism is not limited to politics/governance but also along relations of kinship and economy among others (Lebner, 2021).

Islam) can likewise be read as a form of mobilizing their community through sensorial practices. These mobilizations, through the codification of emotions and senses, are responding to secular regimes that seek to regulate diversity. But this mode of response is ensured to be compatible with these regimes, which may not be the case with substantive modes linked to Indian 'race' in Malaysia. It is in this sense that the code is thereby privileged over substance in defining personhood among them.

Forms of Personhood

Up to this point, the chapter has examined the processes of personhood among Indian Muslims, focusing on emotions and senses as bodily techniques that engender a distinct sociality. In this final section, I now explore how this personhood holds up comparatively. The first aspect is the notion of 'dividual' that personhood among Indian Muslims clearly exhibits. My ethnography examined the cultural attention granted to emotions and senses which revealed how they relate to others. Emotions and senses, codified into sentiments and sensibilities respectively, were a form of knowledge that Indian Muslims were intimately conscious of in their social actions. This relationally embodied consciousness is such that meanings of social actions are realized in the body through shared awareness of what an act entails and who such an actor thereby is. Relations here are not the by-product of personal interactions but rather pre-exist these interactions, wherein they are activated by these persons. Sentiments and sensibilities are thus coded ways of eliciting relations and making them visible, providing a basis for differentiating themselves as persons and as a community. Being enmeshed in such relations thus renders a person a dividual.

Personhood here is disclosed through the flow of relations that come analytically prior to a person. Dividual is thus an alternative way of articulating how subjects analyze their own social lives and elicit relations from others. Marshall Sahlins has raised the concern that this dividual "is threatening to become a universal form of pre-modern subjectivity" (Sahlins, 2011, p. 13),

complaining that the dividual is claimed to be resonating not only in ethnographies of Melanesia but in India, Africa, and even as far as Ming China and Ancient Egypt. Sahlins' proposal that personhood and kinship should be analytically separated, that partibility of substances should not be confused for participation, has been espoused in my analysis. This was the main reason that gift transactions, a paradigm that characterizes the vast majority of studies on the dividual, was replaced with that of bodily experience in order to explore social participation vital to personhood. But Sahlins argues as well that this global resonance of the dividual could also be down to its theoretical juxtaposition to a purported autonomous "Western" individual, one that need not hold up empirically when these "Westerners" are analysed using the same ethnographic methods. My approach here has been to place this individual person at the level of secular ideology rather than with a set of population, or in a "Western" ethnographer that I am not. Individuality thus is linked to a "modern" project or a set of ideas like that of the Lockean forensic person characterized by a continuous consciousness in a single body. Dividual thereby become a means of articulating conceptions of personhood that do not explicitly draw from concepts like individual or society that are embedded in such ideas.

Yet if the term dividual is representative across such a vast expanse of "non-Western" population, to what extent does the term allow for internal variation? For instance, there are considerable differences between the dividual conceived by Marriot in India and that by Marilyn Strathern in Melanesia. Marriot's dividual intended to illustrate that there is no distinction between mind and body in Indian personhood, for which he characterized it as the transmission and absorption of coded-substances in social interactions (Marriot, 1976). In Strathern's articulation, the Melanesian dividual was argued to be partible (Strathern M., 1992). Relations here condense into bodily substances or external objects, during the circulation of which persons have to detach what they consider a part of themselves. Each person is thus

composed of multiple detachable substances and actions that make her partible. Cecelia Busby articulated another variation of the dividual through the notion of permeability (Busby, 1997). Here, substances are not extracted or detached as in the partible person but are rather extended from persons. The flow of such bodily substances is the means through which relations are generated. Fowler argues that these variations merely indicate different processes of the formation of personhood (Fowler, 2016). The focus on code rather than substances means that my data are more indicative of the permeable nature of transactions. Emotions and senses are not extracted by persons in social interactions but are rather permeably extended between them. Yet such abstractions on personhood can only be tentative when based on mere ten months of fieldwork. It is still early to derive generalized claims from the ethnographic data presented about Indian Muslims in Malaysia here. My focus has been to ethnographically illustrate the processes of personhood and the concomitant sociality they engender.

Conclusion: Whither Culture?

In these illustrations, emotions and senses provided me with a means of bracketing such relational processes of personhood. But what can such processes tell us about culture? After all, my ethnography presented a cultural account of Indian Muslims in Malaysia through these emotions and senses. During an extended conversation with Mr Nisham early into my fieldwork, I referred to the oft-invoked concern of "preserving" Indian Muslim culture that I felt was common to both sets of communities. He exclaimed that it is not the same for his people from the sentiment communities and those from the sensibility communities. "We have this much to preserve", indicating outstretched hands, "while they have so little" – "they" referring here to the sensibility communities. Yet Mr Nisham found it difficult to describe what exactly encompassed this culture that he indicated through his outstretched hands. The most he could articulate was a set of obligations that are contextually expected from a person. I related

this incident to Mr Sufyan from the Malabari community, expecting him to be affronted by the patronizing remark over his community. Surprisingly, he agreed with Mr Nisham, claiming that all his community has left were ritual hymns and "a few food items". It was these responses that inspired me to explore these sets of communities through emotions and senses. At the tail end of my fieldwork, I presented both of them with an early draft of chapters three and four on emotions and senses respectively. Mr Nisham was excited that I could capture through emotions much of what he could not articulate about his "culture". Mr Sufyan was similarly impressed and claimed he never thought of his "culture" through sensations. Yet, importantly, both of them had similar remarks. Why am I interested in these mundane aspects? These are "secondary" and not what their people think about every day.

Lambek and Boddy argue that what we tend to foreground in our cultural analyses is in actuality the background for our interlocutors (Lambek & Boddy, 1997, p. 14). Mr Nisham and Mr Sufyan found little utility in such expositions. Mr Nisham wanted "more history and politics" in my descriptions of their communities, history as their pasts and politics as their futures. Taking on the airs of an anthropologist talking about culture, I tried to explain to him that we are trying to go deeper into how human perceptions and actions are structured. With one question he punctured those airs of mine. "Where is this culture that you claim to study beyond our history and politics?". I fumbled and garbled a few anthropological definitions of culture while his face transformed from curiosity to confusion. While he was far from convinced, it dawned on me that we tend to think through culture rather than think about it. Culture for Mr Nisham may be a form of collective differentiation, with differences being highlighted by denying similarities with those outside their group. On the other hand, anthropologists tend to begin by invoking the basic similarity of all humans and then proceed to stabilize differences at the "level of cultural entities" (Candea, 2010, p. 135) – an abstract level conjured by us wherein similarities are more comfortably located. It is here that Abu Lughod's influential

criticism of culture becomes pertinent. Both its popular usage and anthropological usage risk freezing difference and thereby give culture a sense of being evident (Abu-Lughod, 2008).

Yet culture as a term can retain its explanatory power if it sheds its pretensions of mirroring reality. We acknowledge that it is a heuristic "device for organizing information and so creating knowledge" that will remain partial at best (Lambek & Boddy, 1997, p. 14). Culture need not be nominally "mapped onto a named group of people" (Candea, 2010, p. 135), but is better examined in dialectical relation to concepts that capture human experiences. Personhood, emotions and senses are such concepts that I have employed here for this endeavour. Rather than particularize differences in a container-like notion of culture, personhood allows us to stabilize these differences at all scales of social relations. Thus, similarities and differences were located in bodily techniques connected to emotions and senses, in the spatiality of domestic relations, in temporal imaginations of belonging, and responses to secular regimes of modernity. As the chapter kept moving across such scales of relations recurrently, personhood became a means of capturing these crisscrossing at the tangible level of the person. Culture subsequently emerges in the form of embodied awareness shared among my interlocutors. In these expositions, culture betrays our humanity in our ability to empathize with the acts of others while realizing the ineffability of human experiences. It is only with such humility that culture as a form of knowledge endures.

Chapter VIII: Closure: By Way of Conclusion

The anthropological concept of personhood constituted the overriding theme of the research, with Indian Muslims in Malaysia being the subjects for this exploration. The introductory chapter elucidated the historical and social context of race and religion being intertwined in Malaysia, particularly that of Malay ethnicity and Islam. Indian Muslims thus participated in the social setting of Malaysia by blurring this entanglement of identities, emphasizing their Islamic credentials but strategically evoking or evading their Indian roots. Ethnography was the key method used for this exploration, and its methodological subtleties were discussed in chapter two. I took on a reflective tone here in narrating the conundrums of fieldwork and the challenges of ethnographic writing. The theme of personhood brought about particular issues with regard to fieldwork methods and notions of genre. The emphasis of the chapter was not to provide clear-cut answers to such pressing questions. In fact, I argued that such questions that have persistently bothered anthropological minds need not have straightforward solutions. Rather, the aim of the chapter was to reflexively bring them into the methodological discussion in order to acknowledge the ambiguity and partiality involved in ethnography.

I then moved on to the ethnography in the subsequent chapters, classifying Indian Muslims into two sets of communities according to their migration patterns into Malaysia. The primary discovery of my fieldwork was the cultural attention correspondingly granted to emotions and senses by these two sets of communities. Therefore, a sustained ethnographic focus was given to emotions and senses in chapters three and four respectively. Chapter three provided a narrative of Indian Muslim family businesses in Malaysia through emotions. Their business practices were condensed into sentiments, demarcated as second-order emotions that are articulated, anticipated and reflected upon in their social interactions. Sentiments disclosed how these interlocutors related the present to their pasts and futures. They thereby emerged as socially shaped idioms and strategies for defining and negotiating personhood among these

communities, while also revealing the ambivalences in their practices. Chapter four then moved on to the second set of Indian Muslim communities in Malaysia. Certain rituals and memories attached to Islam were granted significance by them as remnants of their "culture", and were viscerally referenced by them through the senses. These senses as capacities structured social relations that subsequently provided my interlocutors with an avenue to narrate their experiences. My ethnography among them thereby became an attempt to apprehend and portray such sensations. I coalesced these sensations into sensibilities that I argued become sedimented in persons. The senses thus provided an avenue to narrate their histories in the country, while also disclosing the ambiguities they brought about in collective life. In both these chapters, the emphasis was on ethnographic illustration rather than theoretical elaboration. Sentiments and sensibilities were developed for exploring forms of social relations in order to expand on the concept of personhood.

The next two chapters focused on the aspects of space and time respectively. Chapter five emerged from considerations of ethnographically depicting the spatial element of social relations among Indian Muslims. For this, sentiments and sensibilities were spatially grounded in their domestic domain. The exploration here focused on relations in these spaces without delving into the "functionality" of domestic institutions. Rather, space was conceptualized as a property of social relationships that stabilize or shift along with the unfolding of relations. While persons have the capacities to mould spaces, they equally have the capacities to be moulded by them and thereby signify their experiences in distinctive ways through these spaces. As the ethnography of these spaces was carried out primarily during the Covid pandemic, I was forced to communicate with my interlocutors through audio/video calls, messages or emails. The fact that my interlocutors were confined to their houses like me perhaps made them articulate and reflect over the domestic domain. But there were limits to the articulation of emotions and senses in this technologically mediated form of

communication. As a response, the chapter indulged in thick descriptions in order to mitigate this lack of depth. This thickness was narrated through the themes of familiarity, continuity, ambiguity and rupture in order to portray the different tones of emotions and senses in the rhythmic lives of my interlocutors. The domestic space was thus shown to be a site of comfort, familiarity and intimate sociality in certain contexts; or spaces of alienation, ambivalence or instability in others.

I began the chapter with the familiarities of home-making and the physical enactment of symbolic relations. Emotions and senses attached to aspects of housing, dwelling and gender were ethnographically illustrated. I then moved on to the continuity of these domestic spaces through illustrations of bounded sociality, monogamy and ceremonies. With marriage being a key theme here, my focus was on expanding on sentiments and sensibilities through experiences, conceptions and processes connected to marriage. Moments of ambiguity within domestic spaces followed, particularly with regard to labor, parenthood and familial affinity. I concluded the chapter by exploring ruptures in domestic relations that brought about significant changes in the social relations of interlocutors. These strands of thought were then picked up in chapter seven, where I connected domestic spatiality to the notion of habitus. The domestic space was shown to be the primary site for the acquisition of sentiments and sensibilities as bodily techniques. These spaces thereby take on particular political undertones in the Indian Muslim diasporic context where relations outside this sphere were perceived as being dominated by an assimilationist logic of the Malay-Islamic nation. Domestic practices thus became a particular form of politics among Indian Muslims, with emotions and senses being culturally elaborated for the maintenance of their social identities.

Having explored the spatial dimension of their sociality, I then moved on to its temporal aspects in chapter six. Sentiments and sensibilities were temporalized by linking them to diverse forms of belonging in Malaysia. The entanglements of race and religion in the country, particularly

that of Malay ethnicity and Islam, produced a spectrum of temporal imagination ranging from assimilation to ethnic mobilization. In order to examine the processual aspects of such imaginations, I delineated Islam as a site of action and explored this site through the frames of bureaucratization and ritualization. Both these frames were shown to stimulate distinct imaginations of boundedness that predispose persons to think, feel and sense in particular ways. Bureaucratization as a frame disclosed the effects of Islam being intimately tied to the Malay race among my interlocutors. Ritualization was conceived by them as a response to such bureaucratic frames, where certain socially embedded rituals engendered counter-imaginations of collective simultaneity in time as a community.

The chapter moved through the three themes of language, patronage and marriage. Trepidation regarding the loss of their "mother-tongue" was induced by bureaucratic practices that privileged the Malay language, which stimulated certain ritualized responses from the different communities. Patronage as a form of circulation of resources similarly involved competing frames of bureaucracy and ritual. State sanctioned benefits could either be granted or denied to Indian Muslims in the country, both of which motivated many among them to inculcate sustenance within the community. As for the last theme, ritualization in marriage was conceived as a response to its increasing bureaucratization for Muslims in Malaysia. These ritualized responses were taken up in chapter seven as a means to expound on the notion of tradition vital to the transmission of bodily techniques. I outlined two forms of transmission in chapter seven, that of discipline and representation. Moreover, the efficacy of these transmissions was influenced by temporal conceptions of the community. Chapter six ended by illustrating how hope, nostalgia, irony or pragmatism dictate how the present in a tradition can be heterogeneously linked to the past and future.

With personhood as the key concept in chapter seven, the ethnography attempted to arrive at it through a focus on the notion of the body. I thus began with the body through emotions and

senses, progressed on to relations manifested in space and time, and then finally arrived at permeable forms of dividual personhood. In this conceptual movement, emotions and senses were developed into bodily techniques that allowed me to redescribe the role they played in the social lives of Indian Muslims. The technicalities of body and relations among Indian Muslims in Malaysia were illustrated through the notion of habitus and tradition, which revealed how these bodily techniques are acquired and transmitted. The proprieties attached to these techniques, being rooted in the body, serve to substantiate and symbolize personhood for them.

In this substantiation, techniques of the body were condensed by my interlocutors into a code – emotions and senses were codified into sentiments and sensibilities respectively. These were a form of knowledge that they were intimately conscious of in their social actions. Yet consciousness engendered through such culturally elaborated emotions and senses is much more embodied. Sentiments and sensibilities are thus particular ways of eliciting relations and making them visible. Relations were thus illustrated as privileging the code over substance in the articulation of personhood among them. Yet, the chapter went deeper and linked this articulation to the modern condition of secularity. I argued that the codification of emotions and senses are a form of collective mobilization responding to secular regimes that seek to regulate diversity. Thus, while I began this research by indicating the cultural attention granted to emotions and senses among Indian Muslims, the exploration of personhood disclosed the reasons *why* emotions and senses were privileged by them. Beyond this ethnographic contribution, my research brought out the theoretical possibilities of linking personhood with "techniques of the body". The novelty here lies in positing relations as a form of technology that provide an avenue to ethnographically traverse from the body to the person. In these theoretical endeavours, I was bringing together elements of Marcel Mauss' oeuvre that were disparately articulated by him. Thus, emotions and senses were shown to rise to the level of

bodily techniques through the techno-*logic* capacity of relations manifested in space and time. An examination of this space and time allows us to ethnographically capture forms of consciousness, particularly notions of person and self. The interplay of the person and the self provide us with the means to arrive at personhood. It is in this theoretical exposition that I hope for an enduring contribution to anthropology through this research.

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