SPATIAL ORIENTATIONS: NEGOTIATING CLASS, ISLAM AND DIFFERENCE IN DHAKA CITY

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Abstract

This thesis unpacks the religious-secular becomings of upper middle-class Muslims in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Taking the assumption that the religious and the secular are lived together, I discuss not only how the secular and the religious are borrowed from as separate domains, but how they are often quite literally indiscernible. Building on a phenomenology of space, I focus on how my interlocutors in Dhaka feel about and navigate differences of being Muslim, including those who no longer believe, through the social and material spaces that they live in. A phenomenology of space here involves foregrounding the spaces my interlocutors inhabit and how these orient them towards their religious-secular becomings. I show how city spaces enforce class limits, but are also used to negotiate personal and community boundaries around religious-secular beliefs, practices and differences. Thinking of class, religiosity and the secular through space, I argue, allows for a more nuanced sense of how upper middle-class Muslims in Dhaka are negotiating class and religious-secular identity today. Rather than assume that religion and class produce uniform subjects, I argue that a phenomenology of space provides a unique way to consider social-historical determination, intentional action and feeling together in understanding the ethical choices and actions of my interlocutors. This contributes a material and phenomenological orientation to contemporary literature in the anthropology of Islam that moves beyond an over-focus on Muslim self-cultivation and identity that has been so formative of the discipline.

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Glossary

Apa - n. older sister; used as a suffix when addressing a senior woman, both in formal and informal settings

Azaan or *Ajaan* - n. the call to prayer

Bangali - n., adj. Bengali person, culture, ethnicity

Bangla - n. Bengali language

Bakor Khani - n. dry, flaky bread baked in an underground oven

Bajar - n. Market

Beguni - n. fried, battered eggplant

Bhai or bhaiya - n. brother; used as a suffix when addressing a man, both in formal and informal settings

Bhalo nam - n. formal name

Bhasha andolon - Language Movement of 1952

Bhodro - adj. gentile

Bhorta - n. variety of cooked, mashed and spiced vegetables or fish, usually served cold

Bideshi - n. a foreigner

Birangona - n. a war heroine, female survivors of sexual violence during the Liberation War (1971)

Biri - n. local cigarette

Biriyani - n. fried rice dish cooked with meat, spices and sometimes potato

Boi Mela - n. book fair

Boro - n. big, older

Bosti - n. slum

Bua - n. female worker, maid

Cha - n. black tea

Chanraat - n. the night when the moon is sighted and Ramadan ends

Cchola - n. chickpea

Chhoto - adj. small, younger

Corolla or uista - n. types of bitter gourd

Dak nam - n. Nickname

Dal - n. lentils

Dari - n. Beard

Deem roll - n. egg wrapped in a round, soft, fried bread

Deshi - adj. local

Dharmik - adj. religious

Dhormo - n. religion, moral framework

Djinn - n. beings made of fire and air, created by God, according to Islamic scripture

DOHS - Defence Officer Housing Scheme

Dokkhin - n. south

Du'a - n. a prayer, blessing

Dudcha - n. black tea with milk (and sugar)

Eid-ul-Adha - n. an event celebrated on the tenth day of the Dhu al-Hijjah, the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar

Eid-ul-Fitr - n. an event celebrated at the end of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, and the end of fasting

Ganja - n. marijuana

Gojol - n. ghazal, an ancient poetic tradition popular across communities in Asia and the Middle East

Gonojagoron moncho - n. stage of the people's awakening

Hajj or *Hojj* - n. an obligatory five-day pilgrimage to Mecca during the month of Dhu al-Hijjah.

Hujur - n. a religious instructor or scholar, also used to imply that somebody is religious

Iftar - n. meal taken during Ramadan after a day of fasting

Iḥram - n. both the dress worn by Muslims on pilgrimage to Mecca as well as the state of consecration they must assume

Iman - n. faith (Arabic, Quran)

Jali - n. lattice work

Jilapi - n. deep fried dough rings dipped in syrup

Jummah - n. Friday prayer

Kaaba - n. a black, cube edifice at the centre of the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, Saudi Arabia

Kajer lok - n. worker

Khala - n. Mother's sister, aunt; formal way of addressing an older woman affectionately

Khalu - n. Mother's sister's husband, uncle by marriage

Keru - n. a kind of locally brewed alcohol

Khutbah - n. sermon, usually held during *jummah*

Kobiraj - n. traditional healer

Kukur – n. dog

Lungi - n. draped, unstitched cloth worn by men

Mama - n. Mother's brother, uncle; formal way of addressing an older man affectionately

Mami - n. Mother's brother's wife, aunt by marriage

Masjid - n. mosque

Mawaqit – n. plural; prescribed locations designating the borders where the Hajj begins

Mazar - n. pir shrine

Moddhobitto - n. middle-class

Moulavi - n. Quranic instructor

Namaz, namaj - n. the five daily prayers

Nana - n. Mother's father, grandfather; also used as a formal suffix when addressing a much older man

Nani - n. Mother's mother, grandmother; also used as a formal suffix when addressing a much older woman

Nastik - n. (a rough translation of) atheist

Orna – n. shawl, worn by women primarily, draped across the chest and/or over the head

Panjabi - n. a long shirt worn by boys or men traditionally

Para - n. neighbourhood

Pir - n. Sufi saint

Piyaju - n. deep fried onion, lentil snack

Phuchka - n. A hollow deep fried shell filled with a chickpea mixture, onion, grated egg, and served with either yoghurt or tamarind sauce

Phuphu/phupi - n. father's sister

Polau - n. type of fried rice cooked with spices

Puran - adj. old

Rajakar - n. collaborator, particularly denoting Bangali collaborators with the West Pakistan Army during the Liberation War (1971)

Rakah - n. Islamic; one cycle during prayer, each prayer is made up of a specific number of *rakahs*

Ramadan - n. month of fasting for Muslims, held during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar

Rickshah - n. rickshaw, cart attached to a bicycle driven by a man, a common form of transport

Roja - n. fasting, a fast

Saree or Sharee - n. a long, unstitched fabric of various materials that is wrapped and worn primarily by women in South Asia

Sehri - n. a meal taken during Ramadan before sunrise and the beginning of a day of fasting

Shab-e-Barat - n. night of forgiveness, celebrated on the fifteenth of the Islamic month of Sha'ban

Shomoy katta - v. to kill time

Shuddho Bangla - 'correct' Bangla, basically the kind of language used in education, literature and mass communication

Tabeez - n. Islamic amulets, used for blessing or cursing

Tarabeeh - n. lengthy readings of the Quran and saying prayers made up of multiple *rakahs*, often said during but not limited to Ramadan

Tari - n. local alcohol variety

Ṭawāf - n. the ritual seven-circuit movement on the first day of Hajj

Tong - n. roadside tea stall

Tupi - n. Skullcap worn by Muslim men

'Ulama - n. Islamic clergy

Ummah - n. global Muslim community

Uttar - n. north

Waz mahfil - n. an event involving an Islamic preacher discussing a specific topic of religious and social concern

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I was sitting together with Rani on her bed, her cats sprawled around us under the fan. "I really don't know what to believe in," she told me. "I used to say my prayers, but now I don't know." Sitting together like this was a habitual way of hanging out at her place, with her husband Opu, her six (now seven) cats, and the various friends and visitors that would walk in and out every day. Rani would often ask me, "How is your research going, Littol?" She was especially curious to know how my other interlocutors, all of them Sunni[1], felt about their religiosity. Many of my interlocutors did this, but unlike others, Rani was not interested in growing Islamic movements or, conversely, the lack of belief in Bangladeshi society and state. Her questions were much more connected to her own experiences of Islam, her faith, doubts and uncertainties. Much more than simply a question of being a believer or not, Rani's story, like that of many of my interlocutors, is open-ended, with much more plural potentialities than simply an orthodox practitioner, an atheist or agnostic.

Rani grew up in an upper middle-class family, having spent some of her childhood as well as her postgraduate education in North America. Educated at an English medium school, her Bangla medium friends would often tease her for her Bangla.[2] She was a successful professional working in Dhaka's booming development industry, having spent her life in Dhaka living in well-to-do neighbourhoods of the city, including Dhanmondi, Cantonment, Banani and Bashundhara. Towards the end of my fieldwork, she had moved to an apartment she co-owned with her siblings in Bashundhara, a new area that was both up-market, clean, planned and yet still relatively affordable for Dhaka's growing middle-class. Being home to two of Dhaka's most successful private universities, as well as one of its most prestigious international schools, Bashundhara has a thriving young middle and upper middle-class population. Rani's home was emblematic of this neighbourhood's upper middle-class demographic. Not living with family or in-laws, choosing when she wants to have children,

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[1] My interlocutors never mentioned which pathway of Sunni Islam they followed, and I only asked once or twice. The major ones in South Asia are Deobandi, Ahl-e-Hadith and Barelwi (Khan 2012: 2). Deoband was a revivalist Sunni Islamic movement that originated in 19th century northern India, with a focus on moral self-formation (Ingram 2009); also originating in India in the 19th century, the Salafi Ahl-e-Hadith movement centred the hadith, statements attributed to the Prophet, in their practice and condemned saint veneration (Amin & Majothi 2022); grounded in the same Sunni Islamic legal discourse and tradition as the Deoband, the Barelwi movement emerged in contestation of movements like the Deoband and Ahl-e-Hadith, dedicated to protecting local shrine culture and differing from the Deoband primarily in their imaginaries of the Prophet (Sumbal 2021).

[2] The presence of friends and family like me, with my *bideshi* (foreign) Bangla, then gave her the opportunity to pass on the teasing.

changing jobs regularly or working on consultancy contracts, having friends over daily, enjoying alcohol, smoking and the company of flora and fauna[3] in her house – her daily life fit in well with the area and the different choices of life that living independently brings about.

To my mind, these manifestations of upper middle-class urban life were equally written into her religiosity. Looking around the particular space of her apartment, and listening to her story, Rani's religious experience became apparent in its material and immaterial formations. The plethora of animals living in her home were a source of love and energy for her and equally part of her religious experience. On the one hand, her family would say *du'a* (prayer, blessing) for her cat when it was spayed and in pain; on the other hand, she was forced to give away her dog due to her neighbours' displeasure of having it living in the building.[4] At the same time, the art and objects decorating her and Opu's walls included wall hangings of Ganesh, a Hindu deity, which they explained they would have to put away if certain members of their family would come to stay. Neither Rani nor Opu practised Islam in terms of daily prayers or fasting at the time of my fieldwork in 2018-2019; the rhythm of this life was thus absent from their home. Occasionally, Rani would be visited by *djinn* or "shadows", beings specific to Islamic cosmology, whom she did not technically believe in but who would come to her ever since her childhood. It is in these experiences, particularly within her home space in Dhaka, that I locate her religious-secular becoming.

Religious-Secular Becoming and Difference

Religious-secular becoming grasps how the religious and the secular are lived and experienced together and cannot always be read apart. In Rani's case, she felt and experienced *djinn* while not believing in them, bringing beings strongly tied to Islamic cosmology outside of the parameters of religion. Rather than think of this exclusively as a religious or secular self-formation, and one that is independent of other kinds of selving, I speak of religious-secular

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[3] The kinds of animals and plants people keep, and who takes care of them, are also indicators of class and lifestyle. Having special dog breeds as opposed to the mixed breeds found on Dhaka's streets (*deshir kukur* – local dog) implies a certain income and privilege. At the same time, importing plants from abroad, such as succulents, which are also very popular and part of middle-class interior aesthetics in the Global North, is equally a sign of affordance and desire for distinction. In Rani and Opu's case, the plants they grew on their balconies were largely local, including local vegetable varieties like *uista* (small bitter gourd) and local climbing orchids. While for some people this is also a middle-class expression of nationalism, in that the focus is often on planting local plant varieties, and care for home, it is also often simply a very natural thing to do as these are the plants one grows up with and which are available in the thousands of plant nurseries across the city.

[4] Following a popular hadith, it is said by some in Dhaka that angels cannot visit a home if a dog lives there (Hadith 36, Book 59, Al-Bukhārī 1997: 283).

becoming to grasp the plural identities and experiences that affect how my interlocutors, like Rani, become religious (or not).

Looking at her life as a confluence of objects, foods, beings, bodies, practices, feelings, thoughts, doubts, beliefs, certainties and uncertainties, it becomes clear that Rani's experiences of religion and her own religiosity are manifold. While the lives and religiosities of all my interlocutors may not be identical, their stories represent the intersections of the conditions of contemporary upper middle-class life, experiences of Dhaka and religiosity. As I describe more fully in chapter two, I construe the middle and upper middle-class through class histories in South Asia and Bangladesh (cf. Barlas 1995; Fernandes 2006; Pernau 2014; Maqsood 2017), my interlocutors' material conditions, the spaces they can access, and through their religious-secular experiences. Such experiences are written into Rani and Opu's home life, for example, by hanging objects pertaining to other religions in their home, only to remove them again when compelled to do so by the religiosity of their family members and visitors.

The term upper middle-class is itself not used very often in literature on class in Dhaka, and basically not used at all by my interlocutors. However, I draw a distinction according to socio-economic stability, as well as access to and desire for specific kinds of spaces in order to forge certain kinds of becomings. This includes religious-secular becoming, which I see as inimically and materially tied to experiences of space and class.

I use the term religious-secular here as a rough portmanteau to reflect the hybrid and dialectic, rather than oppositional, relationship of the religious and the secular today (cf. Latour 1993, 2013; Asad 2003; Fernando 2014; Mahmood 2015). On the one hand, the idea of religious-secular becoming foregrounds what Asad (2003) and Mahmood (2005, 2015), most famously, have described as the imbrication and mutual interdependence of religion and the secular. Rather than opposites, the secular necessarily relies on constructing the religious as its other in order to exist at all (cf. Latour 1993). Mahmood's work has been foundational in that she unpacks how the assumptions underlying secularism are not simply given, rather they are very much tied to plural constellations of "historic, institutional, and discursive conditions" (Tareen 2018: 156).

In the context of Bangladesh, secularism was long construed by local scholars in the Western sense of a separation of state and religion (Ahmed 2001; Mohsin 2000; Uddin 2006). These authors describe secularism as part of the platform on which the Liberation War of 1971 was waged against West Pakistan, under the leadership of the East Pakistani Awami League party led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the same party which forms the government of

Bangladesh again today[5]. An ensuing disappointment in the disappearance of the principle of secularism in local politics after Bangladesh's independence was strongly voiced by local secularist and atheist movements throughout the 1990s and the 2010s, and this critique is often still heard today particularly amongst the middle and upper middle-class (cf. Mookherjee 2015).

As a counter narrative, Neeti Nair (2023) describes how secularism (*dharma-nirappekhata*) was construed by Bangladesh's exiled government during the Liberation War and in the immediate post-war period as no discrimination against any religions, with a particular point of protecting religious minorities (Hindu, Christian and Buddhist primarily), and as a response to the narrative of the West Pakistani army waging a war on Bangladesh in the name of upholding a 'correct' form of Islam (2023: 200). This approach to religious pluralism was inherent to the initial ideas of secularism espoused by Gandhi, Nehru and Patel in India, and Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan in Pakistan. Secularism as religious pluralism was meant to allow people of all religions, whether minorities or not, to live freely and with a sense of belonging wherever they were (India, Pakistan or Bangladesh) (Nair 2023: 250). This idea of secularism, based on safeguarding the religious plurality of the population, however, was vaguely phrased in Bangladesh's 1972 constitution, which was reinstated as the constitution in 2015 (Nair 2022), after secularism was removed from it from 1975 onwards under the military regime of General Ziaur Rahman (in office 1977-1981). In contrast, secularism has continuously been part of India's constitution.

East Pakistani secularism initially, or the way it is narrated, was not centred on Hindu-Muslim tensions, rather it opposed an instrumentalisation by the West Pakistani state of 'proper' Islam (Nair 2023). This narrative was used to justify political oppression in East Pakistan by the West Pakistani state, due to the 'improper' Islam that was seen to be practiced in Bengal. This has been interpreted and discussed by Bangladeshi scholars, like Ahmed (2001), as an inherent tension between Muslim and *Bangali* culture, largely influenced by non-Islamic and sometimes specifically Hindu practices, in Muslim *Bangali* identity. *Bangali* culture, in this instance, became axiomatic for the secular, in that the secular provided a space for *Bangali* and Muslim practices and identities to co-exist. The idea of how to be a good Muslim, how to practice and believe the way one 'should', permeates Dhaka's middle and upper middle-class, a trend found across generations and contexts (cf. Mahmood 2005; Janson

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[5] The land which today forms the territory of Bangladesh was East Pakistan between 1947 and 1971, when Bangladesh declared independence from Pakistan.

2016a). While different from the way the narrative of 'proper' Islam was politically instrumentalised by the West Pakistani state pre-independence, many people are weary of Islamic practices that they see as shunning local practices like *Shaad* (a baby shower) or *Gaye Holud* (part of traditional wedding ceremonies often interpreted as 'Hindu') (Rozario & Samuel 2010: 360). Thus, while the position of minorities is still an important part of the secular in Bangladesh, what is equally important is negotiating Muslimness and dealing with shifting markers of the religious and the secular. For example, while for some *Gaye Holud* is a specifically Hindu and therefore 'un-Islamic' practice, for others it is traditional and *Bangali*, and the right to practise it is given through a secular practice and understanding of it.

At the same time, the secular as religious pluralism is also part of contemporary aspirations towards 'goodness' in Bangladesh. In chapter five, for example, I describe how Hassan Nana believed in supporting people of all religions working in his company. While he did not describe this employment practice as either religious or secular, it echoes the ideals of twentieth-century South Asian secularisms, which themselves were rooted in communal practices during and predating colonialism (Roy 1984; Eaton 1993), with an emphasis on supporting minorities and forgoing communalism, the latter an important understanding of secularism in India post-partition (Tejani 2007: 5). Much like Mahmood in anthropology, historians like Tejani and Nair echo the contextualised, non-universalist nature of secularism, asking us to pause and consider what this may mean for the relevance of secularism in contemporary South Asian societies.

Samia Huq's (2010, 2021) work has built on the foundations laid by Mahmood and offered important contributions to understandings of the secular in Bangladesh over the last two decades. On the one hand, she has emphasised how religion and the secular are simultaneously lived and consciously borrowed from by practising (Sunni) Muslims in Dhaka (2010). But she has also shown how the state is involved in regulating both religion and the secular through interventions in public religious practice and the rights of minority religious groups (2013a). While Huq's work has emphasised a distinction between the religious and the secular, Doha and Jamil (2017) have shown how the state's intervention into public Islamic and secular performances are marked by violence, with the purpose of safeguarding the state rather than either religion or the secular. On the other hand, Raqib's (2020) work highlights the desires of Islamic movements to safeguard Islam, rather than a specific religious nationalism, a proclamation that is understood by the movements' critics as a continuation of the discourse of the West Pakistani army and ruling elite during the Liberation War period, wherein war and genocide in East Pakistan was justified as a fight for Islam. Such critiques, however, also play

into the current state's narrative of their legitimacy to rule, as heirs to the secularist struggle of their party, which they themselves can only uphold with the support of Islamic parties and groups, like Jamaat-e-Islami. The works of Doha and Jamil, as well as Raqib, highlight that there is something "unsatisfyingly circular" created through the continued distinction of the religious and the secular (Tejani 2007: 4). Their work also emphasises "how the state navigates its claims to power as an imagined locus of power existing outside society, even as it exercises power through interventions in society", as Iqtidar and Gilmartin's (2011: 494) volume on secularism in Pakistan shows.

Interestingly, unlike in India, Bangladeshi scholars and writers have not turned to the idea of the postsecular to forego this circularity in the same way. Nandini Deo (2018) and Lamba (2020) have written of the postsecular as the potential to think more openly and contextually about the interactions of the religious and the secular in India, doing away with the kinds of circular discourses Tejani highlights as reproducing binaries and, instead, offering alternative understandings of the importance of religion not just to the state, but to people in their daily lives. At the same time, the postsecular has been rejected by thinkers like Afiya Sherbano Ziya (2018), who sees the postsecular in relation to feminist activism in Pakistan as a means to legitimise religious usurpation of secular struggles. Like Ziya, I do not turn to the postsecular here, albeit for different reasons. While the potentials of the postsecular may be to unlearn some of the assumptions of secular thinking within academia, speaking about the religious and the secular together is, to my mind, a more meaningful way to ethnographically explore the religious and the secular as mutually informed and as experiences.

The purview of my work is not to show how the secular itself might be understood differently in Bangladesh versus other countries in South Asia, yet it does draw on and argue for different understandings of secularism outside of Europe. Secularism generally was long studied in relation to religion and modernity in Europe (Taylor 1998; Asad 2003; Habermas 2008). Habermas' (2008) philosophical and ethical framing of secularism (cf. Habermas & Ratzinger 2005; Taylor 2007) is particularly problematic. His understanding of secularism, similarly construed by Charles Taylor (2007), is understood as "respect for the law, for the intrinsic worth of the individual person, the autonomy of the self, moral conscience, rationality, and the ethics of love" (Braidotti et al. 2014: 2). These in turn are rooted in Judeo-Christian principles, which are inevitably rational (ibid.). This in turn would suggest that other monotheistic religions have no recourse to rationality and thus modernity, which Gellner (1992) and Asad (2003) both reveal as historically inaccurate and politically charged.

While secularisms are contextual, they are, however, also part of a wider network of globalising, if not colonising, concepts (cf. Fernando 2014; Mahmood 2015). In this vein, secularisms and secularities have come to be thought of as plural, contextual and linked by common concepts, which, however, can take on different meanings and importance elsewhere (Navaro-Yashin 2002; Needham & Rajan 2007; Tejani 2008; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer & VanAntwerpen 2011; Bubandt & van Beek 2012; Fernando 2014; Mahmood 2015; Rao 2020).

South Asia itself is peppered with plural secularities. Much work has been done to highlight the political and social understandings of the secular in Bangladesh specifically vis-à-vis other South Asian contexts (cf. Huq 2013a; Nair 2023). Religious nationalisms particularly in India and Pakistan have given rise to comparative approaches to secularism and secularisation in South Asia more broadly (cf. Iqtidar & Sarkar 2013; Nair 2023). These studies have successfully shown the ways in which secularism has developed through the shared history of colonialism and partition in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. They have been particularly helpful in shedding light on the ways in which the state and society, and their relationship, are imagined and mediated by religion and secularism. Yet these works (cf. Huq 2013a; Iqtidar & Sarkar 2013; Nair 2023) still rely upon a separation of religion and the secular, an intellectual practice that has been dissipating in the anthropology of Islam and religion more broadly.

Here, my attempt is to lay bare the ways in which the secular and the religious are mutually constitutive and imbricated in the daily experiences of my interlocutors, without necessarily invoking the secular in these terms. This may resemble the experiences of people in other parts of South Asia also. Veena Das (2010), for example, describes the love of an interreligious couple of a lower middle-class background in Delhi. While her exploration is grounded in an analysis of ethics, it also speaks to the ways in which faith and the secular as thought and practice, not just doctrine, inform relationships and urban experiences today. Rather than focus on the differences between secularism and secularisation, or advocating for a shift to postsecularism, my focus here is to show the ways in which the religious and the secular are experienced together.

As Hassan Nana's example indicates, acting in ways that could contextually be read as secular does not mean that that is how he would read his own actions. But neither are his choices divorced from the narratives of the secular that he has encountered both in India and in Bangladesh throughout his life. He experienced Partition in 1947 as a child, Bangladesh's Liberation war in 1971, and the continuous outbursts of violence and ensuing mass migrations

across boarders since the 1940s. What is important is not only the individual histories of people like Hassan Nana, but how their religious-secular practice as upper middle-class individuals shape the spaces and communities they inhabit, such as Hassan Nana's office space. Again, the Muslim upper middle-class in Dhaka as I describe here is not uniform in its faith or secular practice. But through their socio-economic positions and ability to move between plural social spaces, they are able to navigate and affect religious-secular practices in the spaces they inhabit in unique ways. I do not insist on an image of top-down, vertical processes of social change. Rather, my aim here is also to give a sense of how differences in religious-secular practice are markers of the upper middle-class today and this is affecting the ways in which the religious and the secular are being experienced outside of this specific social group. The wider purpose is to show how the relationship between the state, its institutions and society are not the only means to understand secularism or religion, neither do we have to try to understand secularism as separate from religion (cf. Taylor 2011).

By foregrounding religious-secular experience, I build on Mahmood's genealogy of thinking the religious and secular together. Her approach, as Huq's, have offered both a critical movement in rethinking the relationship between the secular and the religious, significantly emphasising the disciplinary power and intolerance which the secular (cf. Latour 1993) and liberal (cf. Povinelli 2006, 2011, 2016) wield, as well as the plural platforms of Islamic movements in Dhaka. Rather than make a stark distinction between the secular and religious, my fieldwork and conversations with my interlocutors led me to think about how it is not always clear what counts as religious and/or secular. But I also take a distinctly experiential, phenomenological and spatial approach in that rather than tracing the powers of the secular, I consider the ways that the religious and the secular not only inform each other, but how these have become a constitutional part of urban and specifically upper middle-class life in Dhaka.

Rani's experience of *djinn*, or what she alternately terms shadows, is an example of how the religious is not merely about ideas, doctrines, practice or belief, but about experience. She does not believe in *djinn*, yet here they are (cf. chapter four). We often spoke about them and now, almost three years after my fieldwork, she feels more religious again, has started practising Ramadan and *namaz* (daily prayers), but never speaks of shadows. We recently had a conversation where we spoke about God. She said she felt closer to God again. I told her that my mother once told me that if I had a firmer belief in God, I would not feel so bad, referring here to my bouts of severe anxiety, loneliness and depression (for lack of a better word). Sometimes I wonder if this is a cruel thing to say, attributing my mental health to a failure of some kind, but fundamentally I understand what she is saying. I sometimes wonder if my lack

of closeness to my faith and to God are a personal shortcoming or an outcome of secular-liberal interventions into how to deal with things like health and feeling 'good'. Rani understood my mother's comment as well and replied that her faith in God has helped her recently in feeling less alone, even if it waivers sometimes.

My phenomenological approach to religious-secular experience is grounded in these kinds of conversations, which are both a reflection of my interlocutors', like Rani's, way of speaking about God and Islam, but also my own. As Ram and Houston (2015) argue, phenomenology in anthropology does not only ask the anthropologist to foreground how their interlocutors perceive and experience the world they inhabit, but it demands that the anthropologist does the same with themselves and their work (ibid.: 1). Drawing on my own experiences, and as they unfold with my (continued) conversations with interlocutors like Rani, I conceive here of religion and the secular less as ideology, institutions or doctrines, and more to do with feeling religious (or not). I explain this further in chapter two, particularly in relation to the material and spatial turn in the study of religion, which are asking us to think of religious experience and feelings through objects and inhabited spaces.

I further take a material and space-based approach to class, with a strong focus on mobilities and material conditions, but without over-emphasising consumption. Rather than label Rani's experience simply as upper middle-class, privileged, liberal, religious or secular, exploring the material and immaterial manifestations of her religious experience to me became a mode of understanding her experience of difference. While religious difference is often studied in terms of different religious groups, schools, communities, or in opposition to the secular, I here speak of difference also in relation to one's 'community' (here urban, upper middle-class and Muslim) and to oneself. How do my interlocutors (and how do I) deal with their (our) own differences and changes? Thinking of Rani's story, I wondered how to speak about all these different kinds of identities and experiences together. We are not only defined by a single identity at any given moment in time (though one may feel stronger in specific instances). Rani, for instance, is considered Muslim due to her family and upbringing, but she herself felt much more ambivalent about this identity. Bringing together class, religiosity and space, I argue, offers the opportunity to show how the different layers of identity my interlocutors inhabit come together to create both deeply personal (and very class-specific) experiences of the religious-secular and ways of inhabiting the world.

Speaking about religion, and specifically Islam, in these terms offers a broader sense of religious-secular becoming and experience, beyond the discourse on pious self-formation (cf. Alidou 2005; Mahmood 2005; Hirschkind 2006; Schulz 2012). Religious-secular becoming

draws on ideas of the religious self, but focuses more on the relationality between people and spaces as they navigate the complex terrain of religious-secular belief, values and living. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (2004), Retsikas (2012) writes of the becoming of his interlocutors in Indonesia in terms of plural identities and heterogeneity. On the one hand, becoming offers the possibility to think of people and their identities as interconnected, with different parts shifting in and out of focus while others are revealed (ibid.: xxix). At the same time, becoming also lets us think about how heterogeneities are transversally connected. Retsikas speaks of assemblages that make up a person, which "continually transform themselves into each other, cross over into each other" (ibid.: xxx). Importantly, he likens becoming to an indefinite line, which offers the possibility for exponential difference (ibid.). In other words, people are constantly changing, moving in all kinds of directions while inhabiting many different identities at once, each also continuously connecting with others in pluriform ways. Religious-secular becoming thus allows for a conceptualisation of subjectivity in terms of plural, indefinite self-formation and wholly relationally constructed through class and urban experiences, as I show here. The relationality between identities, or assemblages as Retsikas puts it, also gives way to a focus on the way in which religious and class becoming are intrinsically relationally constructed between people and my interlocutors in Dhaka specifically.

The way Rani and Opu take down images of Ganesh (a Hindu deity) when Muslim relatives come to visit is an example of this kind of relationality. Moreover, while Rani is practising Islam again and feeling closer to God, this does not compel her to adapt her home to her found-again faith, because having a depiction of another God does not change the way she feels about her faith. This is very different for some other Muslims of her class in Dhaka, including some of my interlocutors, who would feel much less comfortable, if not outright blasphemous, about decorating their homes with idols of other religions. This is the kind of scene in which I locate religious-secular experience, where Rani bringing together different kinds of religious feelings, experiences and things (the mask of Ganesh) is not a cause for distress or a sign of a wavering faith. As I discuss in the methodology section of this chapter, carrying a Sanskrit/Hindu name as I do while being from a Muslim family is often considered unusual by South Asian friends and people I meet, though in Bangladesh this is rarely if ever a concern. Many of my interlocutors are also not known by their proper names (*bhalo nam*), which are Arabic, but by Bangali or local nicknames (*dak nam*).

Much of the academic conversations around religion in Bangladesh by Bangladeshi and South Asian scholars, particularly from the secular-liberal perspective, speak of the eradication

or transformation of local cultural practices by Muslims as reactionary and culturally eroding. Following the contested and violent political history of the country and wider subcontinent throughout the 20th century (cf. Ahmed 1988, 2001; Kabeer 1991; Murshid 1997; Mohsin 2000; Uddin 2006), including first Partition in 1947 and then independence from Pakistan in 1971, many studies are occupied with expressions of the secular and the religious in Bangladesh, situating these on dichotomous poles (cf. Kabeer 1991: 39; Uddin 2006: 118; Rozario & Samuel 2010: 354; Mookherjee 2015: 33). The secular here is often read as a safeguard of Bangali 'culture' and local expressions of Islam, expressions which have been described as 'syncretic' in opposition to motions for a 'pure' form of Islam (Roy 1984; Ahmed 1988, 2001). The effect has been a rather tropic and essentialising view of reactionary Muslims in Bangladesh today.

The shift towards talking about piety and self-formation has provided some relief from these depictions of 'reactionary Muslims' in Bangladesh. The works of Maimuna Huq (2008, 2009) and Samia Huq (2010, 2011, 2021) exemplify this trend towards piety and self-cultivation. Raqib's (2020) more recent work also strongly brings into focus the need to rethink what is in the purview of the secular domain, such as women's empowerment, and in what ways Islamic movements in Bangladesh are speaking to exactly these concerns which have been appropriated as specifically secular-liberal discourse. Dominant secular-liberal narratives see particular Islamic movements, like Hefazat-e-Islam – a group of *'ulama[6]* in Bangladesh who joined forces in 2010 to advocate for specific kinds of Islamic education and state policies to safeguard Islamic principles (ibid.) – as causing unrest, shaking the foundations of national secularism, and ostensibly seeking to eradicate what may be identified as non-Islamic religious practices (Datta 2007; White 2010; Zaman 2016). This, for some, is tightly bound up with the activities of a secular state that is, however, not dedicated to upholding secularism (cf. Murshid 1997; Riaz 2004: 38, 39; Riaz 2013; Ahmed 2017; Lorch 2019). Here, the state is considered to collude with political Islamic factions for the purpose of securing votes rather than actively dedicated to maintaining secular values (cf. Mookherjee 2015).

Mookherjee's (2015) work, though not focusing on Muslim religiosity, shows how the secular state and civil society can fail and endanger its citizens. Mookherjee's closest interlocutors spoke openly of their experiences as *birangonas*, 'war heroines' and survivors of sexual violence during the 1971 Liberation War. They described their treatment by local

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[6] Often translated as religious scholars, the *'ulama*'s purview is broad in that they interpret and transmit religious (Islamic) knowledge, but also participate in how religious knowledge and transformation evolves, both on a social and political level (Zaman 2002; Raqib 2020).

secular feminists: their public testimonies were used as a platform for a secular liberal movement to confront the presence of *rajakars* or collaborators with West Pakistan's army from 1971 in Bangladeshi politics. This left Mookherjee's interlocutors in a tense position in their home communities, with little to no protection from the state or civil society. The tensions around prominent *rajakars* is further exacerbated due to their affiliation to Bangladesh's Jamaat-i-Islami party. These tensions erupted anew during the 2011 and 2013 unrests in Shahbagh. 2011 saw a secularist movement initiated by the Blogger and Online Activist Network (BOAN) calling for the death sentence for high-profile collaborators of the 1971 war (Zaman 2016, Raqib 2020). Later it became known as *gonojagoron moncho* – the stage of the people's awakening (Raqib 2020: 19). The events of 2013 saw a composition of both a religious protest organised by Hefazat-e-Islam and a counter secular protest movement (Tripathi 2013; Doha & Jamil 2017). Both were met with a brutal crackdown through state forces.

In the midst of these tensions and eruptions of religious-secular violence in Dhaka, the move to understanding Muslim experiences as religious and secular, has been crucial. The works of Raqib (2020) and Samia Huq have offered a way out of thinking of Muslim religiosity and Islamic movements as faceless, nameless antagonists of the country's secular foundations. Secularity and religiosity are experienced simultaneously by Huq's middle-class interlocutors in the everyday (Huq 2010). Students and factory workers on the one hand are considered to desire secular-liberal outcomes, but they also uphold the religious. The Muslim women in Huq's work, for one, use religious rhetoric to speak more fully to their self-formation (ibid.: 103).

My contribution is to think about how different parts of my interlocutors' identities converge with their religious-secular experiences, and specifically in Dhaka. Rani has not always identified as Muslim, sometimes she has been profoundly unsure. And she is also many more things than just Muslim or a woman or upper middle-class. In her work on the middle-classes of Lahore, Ammara Maqsood (2017) importantly speaks about layers of identity and experience. Similar to Mahmood's, Maimuna Huq's and Samia Huq's interlocutors, her interlocutors pursue religious subjectivation through prayer groups and religious schooling. Maqsood identifies this as a characteristic particular to what she terms the 'new middle-class' in Pakistan, people and families who are more recently socially mobile, due to recently accrued wealth rather than inheritance, and less able to rely on family capital, both social and monetary.

My aim here is not to offer a similar sense of a specifically defined upper middle-class religiosity in Dhaka. Rather, focusing on space, class and religious-secular experience together allows for layers of identity and experience to be spoken of together. Piety is thus not the only

outcome of religious experience, neither is there only one way of being pious. Rather than focusing on ethics (Lambek 2010; Robbins 2004, 2007, 2013, 2016; Laidlaw 2014), self-cultivation (Mahmood 2005; Huq 2008, 2009), dreams (Mittermaier 2011) or failures (Beekers & Kloos 2017), I turn to different kinds of identification, space and religious-secular experiences to show how my interlocutors inhabit different identities together, every single moment, how they weave in and out of their own narratives, and how this both affects their lives, the people they live and work with, the class(es) they inhabit, and life in Dhaka. Though by no means universal to all, a wider trend that I found in most of my interlocutors' stories was a discussion of their feelings in order to make sense of their religiosities. While the outcomes were always quite different, this emphasis on feeling was striking.

This hyper-intersectional approach, as I see it, offers the tools to think about change, difference and becoming as happening continuously, across modes of identification and in relation between body/selves, histories, faith, ideas, discourses, objects and spaces. Through phenomenology, my approach not only allows me to connect my interlocutors' sense of self and their inhabiting and negotiation of ethics in the everyday, but it also allows for exploring the way they perceive and feel about the world around them, in terms of Dhaka as a place, Bangladesh, geopolitics, capitalist networks, and the more general concept of world (which I explore more fully in chapter six).

At the same time, I have sought to move beyond discussions of being Muslim as an exclusively ethical question. However, as I elaborate further in this chapter, I consider my interlocutors' moral negotiations as part of how they negotiate their differences, within their homes, spaces of leisure and at work. I think of moral negotiations here in relation to Robbins' (2013, 2016) work. I do not insist on a clear distinction between ethics and morality, in terms of morality being based on set codes, norms and social constraints shared by society, and ethics being a more reflexive, individual response (cf. Zigon 2007; Fassin 2015). But I also do not completely pursue the idea of ordinary ethics (Lambek 2010), in that, as Robbins (2016) explains, it leaves little room for the (re)generation of values and ethical questions through transcendental events and religious experiences (Mattingly & Throop 2018: 479). I argue that discussing space, class and religious-secular experience together allows us to think about moral negotiations, orientations, change and difference as processes that are at once social, personal, material, agentive, rational, emotional, divine and fateful.

I also intentionally did not privilege any specific kinds of subjectivation, following Sarwar Alam's (2018) approach in rural Bangladesh. In this way we can think of Muslims as anthropological subjects not only as striving towards coherent selves and not only as (un)ethical

subjects. Schielke (2011, 2015a, 2015b) and Beekers and Kloos (2017), among others, have explored how their interlocutors are not always committed to moral striving. But the ethical still seems to be an important part of how we have been speaking about Muslim personhood and subjectivity in the anthropology of Islam. Thinking of religion, space and class conjointly offers a way to think about different kinds of identities and experiences together, and not only in terms of ethical choice and agency. It also offers the opportunity to think about how people's religiosities are not always or only a question of choice, but also about something beyond that, which I locate in my interlocutors' discussions of their feelings.

By thinking through experiences like Rani's, of wavering faith and managing the expectations of religious (*dharmik*) Muslim relatives, colleagues and neighbours even within her own (private) home space – for example, by not keeping a dog – we can move away from normative discussions and public/political discourses on religious-secular divisions in Bangladesh. This is important for Dhaka and Bangladesh specifically, as there is an apparent divide between the literature on how people feel about their religiosity (cf. M. Huq 2008, 2009; S. Huq 2010, 2011, 2013), and how religion and secularism are enacted within the public space of the city (cf. Khondker 2009). Doha and Jamil (2017) and Raqib (2020) have done vital work in this direction already. My contribution also lies in expanding on the ideas of public and private space and how they interact in Dhaka through religious-secular experience, as I explain further below. Bringing class, religion and space into conversation with each other is my attempt to bring these conversations around religious-secular reflection and feeling, and religion in the public sphere closer together. I also shed light on how the language of local Bangladeshi scholarship on religious-secular difference - spoken about in terms of liberal-conservative differences – is reflected in the language(s) of my interlocutors. This thesis grapples with these binaries and the meanings they hold for my interlocutors (when and if at all).

The stories of my interlocutors illustrate how the negotiation of the secular and the religious is part and parcel of everyday experience for the upper middle-classes through space. Rani and Opu gave up on keeping dogs in their apartment due to the religious sensibilities of the tenants in their building, despite being the owners of the space. Living together separately from their families was both a marker of income and class, but also a condition that allowed them to live in and decorate their homes as they pleased, with idols of other religions, drinking alcohol or eating during Ramadan. They were also susceptible to pressures of their class, needing university degrees, scholarships, good employers (if not their own businesses) and an attractive income not only to sustain the growing living costs in the city, but also to meet social

and familial expectations of what a good life is. Seen together, these experiences create an environment of constant negotiation and reflection (ethical and moral), and reassessment of who they are, who they want to be, what kind of life they want, what place God and/or Islam have in it, and what aspirations (moral or otherwise) are worth striving for.

Thinking of religious-secular experiences through space offers the tools to think through the relationship between social/identity categories, faith, fate, God, agency, creativity, self and other, human or non-human. It is in the interstices of these entanglements that difference and hybridity are born. The way Rani and Opu negotiate their own and other's religiosities through their home space, for example, by hanging and removing the mask of the Hindu deity on their wall, is an example of the kinds of religious-secular experiences through space that I centre here. Space and religious experience together offer the possibility to understand how my interlocutors are formed by their identities and choose to act accordingly, how their identities and actions shape their environment, and how different feelings and experiences open up the possibility of being different. Schielke (2010) has previously argued that there may be 'too much' Islam in how Muslim lives are being discussed in anthropology. A phenomenology of space, particularly in the way Ahmed (2006) lays it out, could provide a means to understand the curious imbrication of individual, collective, discursive, material, immaterial, divine or fateful action/effects. In this way, I do not overfocus on Islamic texts or reasoning, which Schielke has 'warned' against, but I simultaneously do take seriously my interlocutors' explanations of their (non)practice and (non)belief through references to the divine, God and Islam.

Religious and Urban Aspirations in Dhaka

The intersectional approach to identity that I follow is similarly accompanied by a focus on location. Rather than speak of Bangladesh or Bangladeshi society, which I think would require a closer examination of nationalism and national identity than I offer here, I focus specifically on Dhaka in order to trace the particular relations between space, class and religion through the narratives of my interlocutors.

I started this chapter in Rani's home, partly because I spent a lot of time there, but also because private and public space in urban environments are tightly knit. I discuss this more explicitly in chapters three and five, but the tensions of religious and secular movements which play out on the streets and squares of Dhaka (Doha & Jamil 2017; Raqib 2020) are reflected in the homes of my interlocutors, like Rani. The spaces like Rani and Opu's home and the way they negotiate their religious-secular experiences there are both private but also not – others,

like their neighbours, have a stake in their home life too (whether this is fair or acceptable is very much up to debate, but I will not dwell on this here). Either way, whether owned apartment, mansion, street side or park, public or private, these spaces are all part of the spatiality of Dhaka; they are interconnected and they matter.

On the one hand, this locational and spatial perspective is important to me as an anthropologist, as the physical context of many ethnographies often disappears behind theoretical overtures and interlocution. This is also very much the case in much writing within the anthropology of Islam. Partly this is due to a (understandable) focus on self-formation and social/community ethics and values that has dominated the anthropology of Islam, rooted in the sub-discipline's formative development of thinking of Islam as a discursive tradition (Asad 1993, 2009; Fadil 2019). This interiority is also very much also prevalent in writings around phenomenology, and the more recent debates pertaining to the ontological turn and whether we are writing/speaking/thinking of one or multiple worlds (Pina-Cabral 2017; Pedersen 2020; Nadasdy 2021). While in the anthropology of Islam there has been a strong focus on discourse and the self, the latter has been occupied with questions of human experience, how this takes place between people, and what bearing this has on how we conceive of the 'human condition', the ostensible purview of anthropology as a discipline.

The approach to location I take is also very much in the interest of the inhabitants of Dhaka (and those dedicated to its richness and liveability), a very particular kind of place where questions of religious identity, class and access are constantly debated. Adnan Morshed and Kazi Khaleed Ashraf (Bengal Institute 2017), for example, speak of cars in Dhaka as an expression of middle-class desire and need for mobility (and safety), but one that inevitably affects how the city is inhabited and experienced, with significant implications for the environment and infrastructure. Cities are always being improved - either paved over or made green again, built up or torn down, accessible by car only to have vehicles taxed or banned when emissions and environmental erosion are too far gone. Similarly, the way religious-secular experiences are negotiated, such as when debates around where a mosque can or should be built ensue[7], reflect how the spaces of Dhaka are always in tension, leaving local government, planners, academics/thinkers and city inhabitants occupied with the question "where do we go from here".

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[7] This happens rather frequently. Some of my friends and family have told me of land disputes, a common feat in Dhaka and other parts of Bangladesh, where land prices are literally soaring. These are forcibly ground to a halt when one party builds a mosque on the disputed land. This effectively ensures that neither party can use the land, and the mosques often remain locked up and unused.

Scholars in the anthropology of Islam have also been focusing on the question of aspiration for their Muslim interlocutors. Naveeda Khan (2012), for example, has framed Muslim religious becoming as a national aspirational project of becoming for Pakistan. In the context of Bangladesh, the question "where do we go from here" also lingers behind many artistic and scholarly endeavours that grapple with the complexities of religious-secular identities in the region. Munem Wasif's (2009-2016) installation piece *In God We Trust* presents multiple simultaneously playing videos accompanied by photographs with inscriptions detailing the breadth of Muslim religious identities in Dhaka today. Speaking to the pivotal works on Bengali Muslim identity by writers like Rafiuddin Ahmed (1988), Asim Roy (1984), or Richard Eaton (1993), but grounded in very personal experiences of religious becoming in contemporary Dhaka, Wasif's work asks precisely how to accommodate the range of identities held by one person and still live as one society, nation and religious community. As much art does, Wasif's provides the possibility of asking and engaging the questions, rather than insisting on answers.

A parallel conversation also looks at Dhaka's city spaces to ask what the place of religion should be in the 'public sphere'. The spatiality of the city and its relevance to religious-secular discourses in Dhaka becomes apparent through the narratives of, for instance, Shahbagh as a site of political protest and activism, such as the Bangla Language Movement (*bhasha andolon*) in 1952 or the Shahbagh movement, initiated by a secularist bloggers network in 2011 (cf. Doha & Jamil 2017; Raqib 2020). The clashes between what have been termed 'religious' and 'secular' forces here are tied to place and space. The politics of urban space in local religious-secular discourses are further evident in the way the use of public space is scrutinised by Bangladeshi academics, planners and thinkers. In an article on the contestation of public space between secular and religious forces in Dhaka since 1971, Khondker (2009) discusses religious Muslim activities in Dhaka's public space. He describes how everyday streets and squares are used for *waz mahfil*, an event involving an Islamic preacher discussing a specific topic of religious and social concern. At the same time, it explains that the erection of a mosque or *mazar* (pir shrine) within the city remains uncontested by the city governments[8] (ibid.: 136-7). This is understood as a policy of appeasement towards a particular religious community.

Another current example is the recent removal of the statue of a blindfolded woman in a *sharee*, holding a sword in one hand and a scale in the other, from the foreground of the Bangladesh supreme court. The statue was created by a local artist and represents justice, but

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[8] Dhaka is municipally governed by Dhaka North City Corporation and Dhaka South City Corporation.

was recently condemned as 'un-Islamic' by certain Islamist groups, to which the government responded by removing the statue from its original place. After public outcry among the liberal elite, it was reinstalled, albeit in an inconspicuous part of the supreme court grounds (Emroz 2017; The Economist 2017). The city space is thus not only a site of contestation but very much a part of a discourse that sets religion (in terms of Islam) and the secular at odds with one another.

Sanjukta Sunderason (2020) recently wrote about the Bengal Famine of 1943 as foundational for modern Indian artists, like the Chittagong-born sculptor and printmaker Somnath Hore (1921-2006), and the global cultural left as a means to develop aesthetic modernity and simultaneous decolonisation in the twentieth century. "This attention to the local as a site of intersections and reconfigurations is a step toward understanding dissonances and contradictions within the apparent homogeneities of the nation-state," Sunderason (2020: 35) writes. In other words, the specifically local allows us to move beyond tropes like East and West, global and local. I similarly view the spatiality and environs of Dhaka as a situated place as well as a site reflecting global dynamics like class, capitalism or the Muslim *ummah*. I began this chapter in Rani's bedroom, only to zoom out and allow my lens to take in her home, the people in it, her stories, her neighbourhood, her city, the wider religious community, and the world. The city forms the basis of the material, embodied and spatial approach of this thesis. When I speak of spatiality, I refer to the neighbourhoods people live in, the mosques they choose to pray in (or not), the forms of transport they use, amongst many others.

Spatiality has much to say about how religiosity is negotiated and oriented in the city and among the middle-classes. Rani's is one of many upper middle-class experiences in the city and is representative of shifts and tensions in the meaning of class and middle-classness, of what it means to be of the urban upper middle-class in Bangladesh and in the world more broadly. Experiencing space, to me, is not merely a passive position; rather, experience is much more mutual and creative. This highlights the dynamic relationship of space and subjects. Space does not merely function as a manifestation of the social, which is how many discussions of religion and secularism in Dhaka have approached the city space. Rather, space, the religious-secular, class and people are mutually constitutive of one another.

I have found it very difficult to write about religious-secular experiences, partly because they are things I can feel and experience, but which I find very difficult to describe. They can sometimes elude us, or certainly me. I was once sitting with two Tunisian friends and academics, both brilliant authors in their own right, over dinner in London. Both had grown up in Sunni Muslim households though one now identified as atheist. For one reason or another, I

told them that I do not kill spiders, simply because that's what my mother had taught me (as I am a vegetarian of almost twenty years, she feels I have taken her creed too far). Both my friends told me quite instantaneously, "But this is Muslim. The spider protected the prophet." This is not a connection or understanding of my experience I would have had, had it not been for this conversation. My point is that the religious and the secular can be very elusive, and I, and my interlocutors also, are not categorising our lives and experiences in these ways all the time. Neither they nor I referred to ourselves as 'secular Muslims', a term I heard for the first time from an Israeli woman at a shotgun wedding in Berlin in the middle of my fieldwork. Yet even if they are not terms through which we always (or ever) identify, they matter.

To understand this better, here I focus on how a lot of life in Dhaka revolves around negotiating the tensions between these ostensibly separate categories. But this does not mean that people act, feel and define themselves exclusively through this negotiation. Space and religious-secular experience together offer a means to explore not only how religiosity is actively negotiated within the parameters of class aesthetics, tastes and access to education, spaces of leisure, healthcare, mosques, amongst many others, but also how people are oriented towards different kinds of religious-secular experiences through their encounters with space.

Negotiation and Orientation

Rani and Opu's home was carefully created and put together by them, so they can live a life that they value, full of animals, people and plants, with Islam present occasionally through practice, as well as other religious materials like the mask of Ganesh. Much of what I have described about their home so far has been to describe the negotiation of religious-secular identity in the home space. What is equally important is how their home shapes their religious-secular experience and identities. In other words, it is not just a space where things happen, but the constellation of objects, beings and people within it form Opu and Rani's way of being in the world, of believing or not, of practising Islam or not. Borrowing from Sara Ahmed (2006), I refer to this as 'orientation', which is part and parcel of the negotiation that I have described thus far.

Drawing on Ahmed's (ibid.) queer phenomenology and the notion of moral negotiation brought forth in the anthropology of ethics, I propose negotiation and orientation as equal processes of religious-secular becoming. Building on the concept of sexual orientation, Ahmed uses the notion of orientation to think about how feelings towards objects and spaces can direct us and the choices we make. Ahmed's work specifically draws on and speaks to the experiences of cis-gender women and LGBTQIA+ people and how they/we feel towards objects and spaces

differently, and how this also becomes part of how difference is lived. As I describe more deeply in chapter two, I turn to feelings in order to situate my work in the affect-emotion gap (Schmitz & Ahmed 2014; White 2017). This gap emerged out of a heavy reliance on Massumi's idea of affect as unconscious, unspoken 'intensities' (Massumi 2002; White 2017: 177), and emotion as "collectively recognized ways of describing embodied experience." (Rutherford 2016: 286). While affect, ideally, provides a sense of how we feel, emotion is an expression of how we understand and know how we feel. By turning to feeling, I hope to be able to move between both the unspoken, indefinable intensities and the ways my interlocutors try to define and make sense of them.

Moreover, affect is a lot more difficult if not impossible to grasp ethnographically (cf. Rubin 2012; White 2017: 178).[9] My sense was that my interlocutors were quite vocal about how they felt about their religiosities and lack thereof. By looking at their feelings, I try to hold onto something more tangible and that speaks to the material approach this thesis espouses. It is these feelings, located in the spaces of Dhaka, and how they orient my interlocutors and their religious experience that form the crux of this thesis. Ahmed's centring of feelings and space allows for an engagement of a range of identities and experiences at once, something important for speaking about Muslim people as moral subjects imbricated in various and complex power structures (cf. Fadil 2019). The way that Ahmed (2006) theorises queer difference extends beyond queer identities and allows us (anthropologists, academics) to conceive of how difference comes about and what it means to us (people).

I argue that spatial orientation takes further the anthropological concept of moral negotiation by opening up the possibility of feelings, conjured through encounters between bodies and the spaces they inhabit, to drive action and choices. To Ahmed, feelings are the stuff of the social (ibid.; Schmitz & Ahmed 2014) and not merely individualistic and unintentional. Negotiation and orientation are both very dynamic concepts, implying moving and being moved. But while negotiation is very much an intentional process, orientation brings together different kinds of intentions - social, individual, fateful or divine. Importantly, the feelings that orient us have the potential to orient us differently to the paths that may have been socially laid out for us, predefined by our genders, races and socio-economic backgrounds. This, then, works in tandem with the moral negotiation that is so integral to everyday life.

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[9] Despite the difficulty in doing this, Yael Navaro Yashin (2009, 2012) has written brilliantly about space and objects and their affect as connecting the past and the present, and the communities on all ends of these threads of time, in northern Cyprus.

The religious-secular experiences of my interlocutors in Dhaka are both oriented by their genders, class, education and spaces they inhabit, but also by alternate feelings that allow for different kinds of choices to be made. Moral negotiation is then part of their process to make space for themselves in Dhaka and in the world, at home and in the public realm. In chapter five, for example, I elaborate how Azia's moral negotiation around religious-secular identity happens through a negotiation of physical space. Here I bring together the ethical turn in anthropology and material turn in the study of religion to argue that my interlocutors' material realities are integral to how they manage religious-secular difference, individually and collectively. Rani and Opu's home exemplifies this. When they remove the mask of Ganesh to appease others (whilst still [not] practising as they please), they are in the midst of a negotiation of what they think and feel is a right way to live and be religious (or not). This negotiation happens through the materiality of their home, here most notably through the religious object of the mask of Ganesh.

In Rani's story, negotiations of space are entangled with negotiations of her own certainties, beliefs, uncertainties and doubts. The spatiality of her house is both an expression of new modes of living in private spaces in Dhaka, which I elaborate in greater detail in chapter three, as well as of herself. The confluence of animal and plant life (which has grown since I left Dhaka and since the COVID-19 lockdowns in Dhaka), the objects hanging on her wall, the way different rooms are used and how they are inhabited become important expressions of religiosity, secularity and class. Things like hanging objects of other religions (particularly those construed as 'idols'), growing *corolla* and *uista* (types of bitter gourd) on the balcony, living with animals, smoking, drinking, not praying, not fasting yet enjoying *iftari*,[10] foods during Ramadan, having people (friends, family) coming in and out of the house at different times of day. All these habits, things, movements, and beings are expressions of how Rani, and my other upper middle-class interlocutors, experience life in Dhaka and the world, and represent a negotiation of space in terms of what is important to her and what she would like it to be. Private space is thus an extension of self, while also being part of wider conversations of different forms of a 'good' life. It is experiences of the spatiality and materiality of the religious-secular that allow me to trace the negotiations of these categories.

At the same time, moral negotiation implies a very conscious and intentional process, where choice and action are carefully laid out. I am not so concerned with the limits of the

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[10] Snacks for breaking the fast. Though a range of foods considered traditional are available everywhere, a cornucopia of variations exist. I explore these in chapter three.

'everyday' or the side lining of values (see Fadil & Fernando 2015a, 2015b; Robbins 2016). The narratives of my interlocutors instead show how it is not so much values or even beliefs that orient them towards certain actions, but rather their feelings. In chapter six, for example, I speak of Zara Mami's experience of living abroad in Indonesia and how she decided to pray and dress differently not so much due to situational veiling or ethics, but because of the feeling that compelled her to do so. This is a thread that runs through the narratives of almost all my interlocutors. None of them defined this feeling as divine intervention or fate, but they noted the feeling, gave credence to it as a spur for their actions and choices. Ahmed (2006) writes of feelings that are conjured through specific encounters between spaces, objects and people. These feelings are what orient us towards certain choices and paths of becoming. When Zara Mami veiled in Indonesia but not in Dhaka, she could not tell me why, all she could say is that she had this feeling that made her dress differently in each place. While I could theorise that she was adapting to her class background, her upbringing and social life in Dhaka, I do not think this would do justice to her story. Instead, I trace the spaces in which these feelings took place in order to take seriously the feelings she describes. Rather than speak about the affect of space (Navaro-Yashin 2009, 2012), I focus on her feelings in relation to herself, the places she inhabited and her religiosity because these are what mattered to Zara Mami.

This centring not just of feelings but of my interlocutors' own understandings of their experiences has also been a theme within phenomenology in anthropology (Desjarlais and Throop 2011; Pedersen 2020). As Michael Jackson put it:

> Husserl's phenomenological method was one of suspending inquiry into "objective" reality in order to explore the reality of human consciousness. For anthropology, this implies a practical relativism: the suspension of inquiry into the divine or objective truth of particular customs, beliefs, or worldviews in order to explore them as modalities or moments of experience, to trace their implications and uses—the way in which they appear to consciousness (1996: 10).

Similar to Jackson's phenomenological anthropology, Sara Ahmed's work (2006) thinks of consciousness in terms of its worldly dimensions – in other words, "consciousness is about how we perceive the world 'around' us" (ibid.: 27). Ahmed's spatial approach to phenomenology not only speaks to shifts within gender studies towards a focus on experience, but it also echoes the recent sensory and spatial developments in phenomenological anthropology. Most recently, DuFour (2021) has attempted to create a phenomenological

ethnography of space. "Between the experiencing life and the experienceable surrounding world lie spatial horizons." His book describes "the structure and sense of this spatiality…it is a study of the manner in which space is given in embodied, lived experience." (ibid.: 2). While their approaches differ, Ahmed and DuFour's works echo the need to look to space in order to get a little closer to understanding experience itself.

Broadly this has been the purview of phenomenology in anthropology, which is intrinsically connected to the anthropologies of affect, emotion, religion and ethics. Much like in feminist scholarship, the body has been integral in helping anthropology think of experiences of the world and the self as material, corporeal and relational (Jackson 1983; Csordas 1994, 1999; Desjarlais 1992, 1997). Desjarlais and Throop describe how memory, tastes, sounds, smells, visions, dreaming, imagining and feeling are studied together to make sense of shifting perspectives and plural identities (2011: 90-91). Ahmed similarly draws attention to space and feelings to unpack experience and its importance to forging plural, intersecting identities.

When Zara Mami, describes how she practised Islam differently depending on where or which city she was living in, she describes a feeling of not knowing why, it just happened to be so. It is this feeling that is important, this indefinable feeling that is still so formative of how my interlocutors (and myself also) experience religion and the secular. Similarly, when Rani spoke of feeling closer to God, she was not defining this feeling as anything specific, such as love, though it does hint at intimacy. But the feeling allows for a different way of being in the world, in her case (and I wish mine), feeling less alone and perhaps even more loved.

Feeling, then, is fundamental to experience, which in turn is also a deeply embodied thing. Ahmed's approach to phenomenology and orientations is indebted to theories of embodiment that have marked pioneering work in feminist scholarship (cf. Butler 1993, 1997; Diprose 1994; Alcoff 1999; Weiss 1999, 2003; Young 2005). Embodiment has similarly been pivotal to anthropologists dealing both with phenomenology and Islam (cf. Jackson 1989; Stoller 1989; Csordas 1999; Asad 2003, 2011; Mahmood 2005), as well as to scholars of the city (cf. de Certeau 1989; Sen & Silverman 2014). The processes of negotiation and orientation which I use here allow my interlocutors to navigate space, cities, worlds, identity, religion and discourse through the body. By praying or not praying (regularly), by drinking or not drinking alcohol, by going to a *kobiraj* (traditional healer) or *pir* (saint) instead of or alongside a medical doctor, by dressing in particular clothes (and on different occasions), or travelling through the city by car instead of bus – these are all very much bodily experiences. The feelings my interlocutors speak about are similarly embodied and brought about through bodily encounters. Rani's encounters with *djinn* or 'shadows' bring about feelings and sensations that affect her

religiosity. Similarly, Zara Mami's feelings that bring about different kinds of praying and modes of dressing are also affected by bodily encounters in her habitual spaces in Malaysia and Dhaka. More than values or acts of disciplining, I look to the bodily encounters, feelings and (re)orientations towards different paths of believing, practising and being that undergird the religiosities of my interlocutors in Dhaka today.

Methodology

The experiential focus of my work is very much represented within my methodology. Nadasdy (2021) has argued that thinking of the world as one rather than many allows us to ethnographically explore heterogeneity through experience without immediately assuming people exist in parallel realities. As complexity and heterogeneity are at the heart of this project, I too approach my interlocutors as embedded in one world, allowing me to attend to their plural experiences within it.

The ethnography presented here is based on sixteen months of fieldwork spread out between January 2018 and August 2019. The fieldwork phase was separated into an initial phase of six months (January – June 2018) and a ten-month phase (October 2018-August 2019), where the summer in between was spent at home in Vienna. I had offered to send my interlocutors written consent forms, but all brushed this off, whereas some were entirely put off by the idea. Instead, I explained exactly what my project was about, how I would use their stories, that they would be completely anonymised and could always let me know if they wanted out of my project, with no reason needed to be given. I have continued asking whether they are still okay with me including their data. I received verbal consent from all and, for some of my interlocutors, I received written consent as well.

My mother, who was born and raised in Dhaka and Chittagong, travelled to Dhaka with me on both occasions, taking the time to settle me in, introduce me to people, and to have fun with her family and friends. My data collection included interviews and informal conversations. Some of these, particularly those conducted purely in Bangla, I recorded. Many happened rather accidentally so quotations from these conversations were noted down and later checked by my interlocutors (at least I sent these to them, I did not always hear back with explicit reference to any of the quotes I was using, but I received confirmation they were happy for me to use anything they said). To my mind, the process of doing fieldwork did not end in August 2019. Writing this thesis has been an integral part of my fieldwork experience. As I discuss in chapter six, my interlocutor Samia Khala and I only physically met once, for various reasons, though we were both living in Dhaka. Our exchanges over e-mail and WhatsApp have

continued, both in terms of formal questions regarding my work and her religious life, as well as simply staying in contact and catching up.

The extended communication with my interlocutors, my friends and family since August 2019 have in many ways allowed this thesis to grow in depth and nuance, generating a stronger sense of what kind of a place Dhaka is and the lives that inhabit it. Through my mother, I have a wide network of relatives in Dhaka and am thus accustomed to keeping in touch over this distance.[11] Despite not being physically present in Dhaka since ending my fieldwork phase, the senses I get of Dhaka reverberate through my continued connection to my interlocutors, friends and family. It has led to a strange effect where I have not been physically but very much viscerally in Dhaka as I write this thesis. Developing this thesis would not have been possible to the same extent had I solely relied on my official 'data' from my fieldwork period. The ambiguity of the 'field' and its spatial and temporal boundaries is thus very much represented in this thesis. Particularly with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the global lockdowns, which also hampered my return to Dhaka planned for March 2020, communicating with my interlocutors, thinking about their lives and remembering, imagining and theorising the space of Dhaka have been instrumental processes for allowing this project to continue.

As I had never lived in Dhaka before my fieldwork and only knew it through family visits, my experience of it was very much that of a foreigner. My memories and experiences of the religious and secular discourses of Bangladesh, which I discuss in this introduction, were formative of my approach to my field already before my visit. Though I am critical of my position as an 'insider' or 'halfie' (Abu-Lughod 1986; Narayan 1993), a common trope in ethnographic methodologies, my prior experience and relationship to Dhaka were present and subject to significant changes throughout my stay. In this sense, my new experiences of Dhaka and my relationship to my mother's family were woven into my memories and my feelings for the place and the people I knew there, and even those I only knew of through family tales my mother and *nani* (maternal grandmother) had told me. Together they formed the backbone of the ethnography which constitutes this thesis.

My interest in middle and upper middle-class life, in the potentialities of class mobilities in Dhaka, were also very much rooted in my mother's middle-class Dhakaiya background. Her father was a government employee, a position that is a marker of the middle-class in South Asia, as I explore in the next two chapters, and a position still coveted today due

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[11] Though my relationships with different family members certainly transformed over the course of my stay there.

to its security and perks. I have been told that he came from a family of propertied farmers from Rajshahi in North-Eastern Bangladesh, though grew up with family in Dhaka and Kolkata (West Bengal, in present day India) from a young age due to being orphaned after a lethal cholera epidemic. My *nani* was a teacher at English language schools, a common profession for women of upper middle-class households in Dhaka today.[12] *Nani*'s father was also a government official and had arranged her marriage to my *nana* (maternal grandfather).

Yasmin, my mother, attended prestigious schools in Chittagong and Dhaka, completing her studies at Dhaka University in the early 1970s. Though her mother grew up in old town, near St. Francis Xavier's School for Girls, which my mother's siblings also attended, and Yasmin spent much of her childhood in this area, all our family members have moved to newer parts of town, including Farmgate, Mohammadpur, Gulshan, Uttara, and Baridhara. For the last decade or so of her time in Dhaka, she lived with her parents, siblings, staff (*kajer lok, bua*), and a range of pets on Dilu Road, a well-known street and bourgeois neighbourhood in what is now central Dhaka, in a, for the time, very modern (in terms of being architecturally modernist) house which my relatives still often speak about with praise. It is these kinds of conversations - thinking about what kind of house is considered good or praiseworthy, what makes a neighbourhood appealing or not, how these areas changed over time, why people chose to move to different areas, how the constellation in their homes changed, who lived at home and who not and why, what religious backgrounds friends and neighbourhoods had, how religion was practised (or not) or felt in particular neighbourhoods and at home – that channelled my interest in how religious and class experiences are mediated by the spatiality of the city and the materiality of things, objects, bodies and people that inhabit it.

My awareness of the past and present, and the potentialities of the future, played a significant role in the way I (un)structured my fieldwork. First and foremost, my relatives were indispensable, as interlocutors (those who wished to participate) and discussants, as sources of love, help and encouragement, and often as places of refuge when I felt alone, sad or homesick. I spent the initial six months of my research with my distance relatives, Zonera and Naveed, in Baridhara and later moved to my *boro* (oldest) *khala* and *khalu*'s (aunt and uncle) house in Gulshan, an upper middle- and upper-class neighbourhood in northern Dhaka, for the other ten months of my fieldwork. The latter situation came about quite by accident. I was supposed to stay with a friend, however, after my mother left Dhaka I felt very homesick and ended up

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[12] This is still common, however, middle and upper-class women in Dhaka today of course are represented in a far wider range of professions.

staying with my *khala* and *khalu* for a night and they asked me to stay with them. Though of course we had always cared for each other, we grew close throughout my stay.[13] Through spending time with them, I was able to improve my, until now and in my own estimation[14], still very passable Bangla, but I also got to know my family and our histories much better than I knew them before. Living in Dhaka proved to be important to me personally in understanding the various histories and stories that are part and parcel of my own present.

It is through this experience that I also developed an oral history approach to my work. I would ask my interlocutors about how they grew up, in what kinds of households, how religion was practised (or not) there, if anyone in particular influenced them, and what Dhaka was like during their childhoods. The last question was not very interesting to the younger people I interviewed, whereas older people tended to have much to say about it. The northern neighbourhoods of Dhaka that I lived in were very different from the areas my mother grew up in. When she visited, we would stay with relatives in Banani, another upmarket area in the north. I used to tease her for not wanting to move around, especially without a car, until it dawned on me that, from her perspective, this was not the city she had grown up in – we could have been anywhere. Asking people about Dhaka, how they felt there, where they liked to go, what kinds of houses they lived in, was thus a means of identifying class mobilities and how the city had spatially transformed and, more importantly, how they felt about this.

Much like Lila Abu-Lughod's (1986) father was pivotal in helping her start her fieldwork in Egypt, my mother was similarly important in introducing me to people and in certain ways also legitimising my presence. Inundated with researchers and development workers, locally as well as from abroad, middle-class people are particularly sceptical towards foreigners, and particularly to those of mixed or foreign-Bangladeshi heritage as I am, as they are thought to take advantage of their privileges as foreigners, while simultaneously insisting on their connections and right to comment on Bangladesh as 'experts'. My mother's presence helped me meet people and find connections more quickly than I would have otherwise. At the same time, she was important as a source of emotional support. While she was proud that her child was researching for a PhD degree, she always encouraged me to be critical of my position. It was through her that I believe I was able to be both critical of myself, while also accepting when people could not accept my position there, and simultaneously grateful when they could. She would often joke with our family about my foreignness, how I am, for all intents and

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[13] Their generosity and kindness towards me are immeasurable.

[14] A friend and interlocutor, Isa, liked to joke that if I were "full white", I would say I am fluent.

purposes, a white person[15] in Dhaka, highlighting both my privilege as well as my vulnerability (and her concern for the latter). The friends I made over time there, including Rani, would similarly make fun of me and affectionately call me a coloniser. While it was important for me to be precisely not that, it was also important, I felt, to be able to take these jokes and understand them as significant reminders of my positionality.

It was also through my mother that I had been raised Muslim, though because she never attended mosque in Bangladesh, as it was not common for women at the time, I spent a lot more time in Catholic churches in Austria and France where I grew up. I also never received formal religious instruction, reading the Quran in English and only learning how to pray 'properly' in Dhaka with my aunts and uncles there. In many ways, Dhaka provided a time for me to reconnect with my own faith and develop a different kind of practice, as I learned new and relearned old practices. I am not consistent with my practice, though I always feel steadfast in my faith and relationship to God. A lot of this journey is captured in my 'autoethnography of becoming' (cf. Luvaas 2017) throughout this thesis.

It was also through my mother's way of raising me in the tradition of Islam, and our consequent conversations and debates throughout my adult life on personal faith and practice, what was a good way to practice and believe ("Everything in moderation", is her mantra), and how Islam features in European media and global politics, that I also started to practice according to how I feel. These discussions, I believe, have been formative in me pursuing ideas of negotiation and orientation, while the latter is also very much connected to my mixed heritage identity and queer becoming. In this sense, negotiation and orientation are not only concepts to me but also became part of my methodology, orienting me to ask questions in different ways, to approach my interlocutors in a way that reflected my experience also.

My mother was important in ways for my fieldwork that are too numerous to list here. Yet there were many things I had to learn and many mistakes I had to make on my own. For one, I did not know how to ask people the questions I wanted to ask them. I knew how to formulate questions, but I did not know how to formulate them in a way that people would be able to understand or feel invited to respond to. This required multiple takes. While my interview or conversation questions often started in the present – "*tumi ki dharmik?* Are you

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[15] In Bangladesh, the terms girl and boy are not necessarily meant derogatorily but are much rather related to age and the accompanying hierarchies. I will generally always be a girl to anyone who is older than me for the rest of my life. An ancient lady, Bubu, whose exact age is unknown but most certainly three digits, who used to work within our family as a maid and caretaker for the children in my grandmother's generation, is now being taken care of by one of my great-aunts. When she saw my grandmother in 2002, when my grandmother was around 74, Bubu asked my grandmother to sit on her lap, as she had done as a child.

religious? *Tumi ki namaj porteso?* Do you pray?" – they often moved into the imperfect tense – "*shara jibon namaj porsen*? Have you (formal) prayed your whole life?". When I first came to Dhaka, I did not have the intention of asking people about prayer, so as not to assume that this is the main way to express religion. But I soon realised that it is the main method in Dhaka for people to ascertain somebody's religiosity or piety. One day I was taking an Uber to my Khala's (maternal aunt) house in Bashundhara[16] around midday on a Friday. As I was getting out, my Uber driver, a middle-aged man wearing a *panjabi* (long shirt), *tupi* (skullcap) and *dari* (beard), also got out of the car to help me with a jammed door. As I thanked him he formally said goodbye and then kindly, almost as a side note, asked me to say my *fajr* prayers[17]. Prayer, especially *fajr* prayer – the hardest one for many given that it requires waking up early – is thus an important marker of religiosity for many in Dhaka. Of course, asking people whether they pray everyday can be used to make assumptions and judgements about a person, but I began using this question because I realised this was best understood, and I could imply the lack of judgement through my follow up questions.

My questions would then move into the past, asking where people had grown up, with whom, how religion was practised in their home, what (religious and secular) education they received, whether they felt influenced by these early experiences, how they had felt about practising religion or believing in God throughout their lives. Reflecting on past experiences, memories and feelings, comparing these to the present, and discussing hopes and aspirations for the future – these processes allowed me to develop not only a rich ethnography in terms of biographies and stories, but they have also been instrumental in developing notions of class and subjectivation as mediated by experience. Further, this approach has influenced me in thinking about the city not just as a project of modern progress, always drifting towards the (secular) future. Rather, it is constituted by the circulation of material objects, spaces, water bodies, structures, infrastructures and bodies, as well as selves, beings, histories, feelings, memories and stories. Time, in this conception, is much more circular.

Moreover, it was when people started talking about places and particular spaces, such as mosques, cities, balconies, rooftops, neighbourhoods, certain people's houses, the objects in them, or particular rooms in their home, that I began to develop my idea of constructing Dhaka through these intimate histories. Listening to people's stories, how they reflected on the city, the religious-secular environments they had known and how these have changed over time, has

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[16] A neighbourhood toward the north-east of the city.

[17] Early morning prayer, the first of the five a day.

allowed me to draw an image of Dhaka, religiosity and class mobility that goes well beyond simple statistics and demographics, and narrow definitions of the secular and religious, the liberal and the conservative, the latter which are often conflated with the secular and the religious respectively. These are the sets of binaries I have been most confronted with in the scholarship around Bangladesh, throughout my conversations with my interlocutors and in the process of writing this thesis.

By also mapping my interlocutors' movements and mobilities throughout their lives across Dhaka, to other cities and villages in Bangladesh, and abroad, the materiality and spatiality of class, and the way people respond to the spaces of Dhaka become more tangible, more apparent as modes of experiencing the world. While I consider the modes of consumption of my interlocutors and how these are intertwined with class, taste, income and privilege (cf. Mathur 2010), I refrain from making casual assumptions or generalisations. My purpose here is not to expose the privilege of the upper-classes in a country of the Global South, though neither do I intend to ignore these processes. That historic and structural inequalities exist in Dhaka (as anywhere) is very clear from the spaces and structure of the city, and the unequal access to the different neighbourhoods, shops, products and even mosques of the city, as well as in the stories of Dhaka's inhabitants. By looking at the experience of space and place, of religion and class of my interlocutors, I rather aim to critically assess how these experiences are part and parcel of processes of subjectivation and place-making.

Being part of a family that spans different segments of the middle and upper middle-class in Dhaka has made me more aware of class mobilities and their multiple forms. This also taught me to see class as a universal experience, notwithstanding local expressions. As a product of the globalising force of capitalism, class takes on particular meanings and involves access to certain kinds of experience which are locally mediated. People in Dhaka are critical of class positions, further adding to the awareness of it in the very structures of the city space. Often when I told people, particularly those identifying as middle-class, that I was studying religiosity in the areas of town that I was, this was often met with what I read as derision and scepticism: as places of privilege, they are not representative of the city and its inhabitants. The upper-classes are already recipients of privilege that significantly differentiate their experience from the lower middle- and working-class segments of society. Moreover, Dhaka, like most capital cities, is not considered representative of Bangladesh, though this is mostly how it is represented by scholars, journalists, the government or non-government organisations (NGOs). On the other hand, many people, particularly those of the upper middle and upper-classes, found the basis of my research important, though again this was based in large part on rather

privileged perceptions of security, surprise at overtly religious younger generations, and academically-inspired interests in the religious-secular history of the country. My choice of place and classes was thus controversial and something I continue to think about and negotiate. Privileging Dhaka, the city that benefits from the most government attention and investment, and focusing on more privileged classes that are growing and mobile, yet a stark minority compared to the poor and working-class, is not a choice to be taken lightly.

My own identity and, from a Bangladeshi and Dhakaiya perspective, foreign origins, were also met with critique and consternation at times, a position I hold towards myself as a researcher as well. Having received an internationally recognised and elite education, owning a red passport, speaking multiple (mostly European) languages, and having been raised in Europe[18] are also subject to critique, a position which made accessing my research site significantly easier and, through my connections to family and friends, opportunities were ostensibly much more available to me. Living with family members who could afford to keep me, having a foreign income to maintain my life in Dhaka, being able to afford to move around the city more-or-less untroubled by daily harassment (not nearly as much as local women in particular will face) – all these are signs of privilege. This is not to say that I never faced inequalities and discomfort, particularly in the form of harassment, but they are also not necessarily the same experiences as that of a local woman, queer and/or young person growing up and living in Dhaka. I thus do not attempt to put my experiences centre-stage, certainly not above those of my interlocutors. Throughout this thesis, I try to be as honest as possible in my representations of the people that make up this ethnography. I do so by making my presence, my foreignness and my interlocutors' perceptions of me apparent throughout. The point is to maintain awareness of my privileges in accessing the knowledges and stories that I did, while not detracting from the narratives themselves.

My mixed heritage had a significant part to play in my experience of Dhaka as well, and in people's perceptions of me. Being half white through my Austrian father and half brown through my Bangladeshi mother, my identity and heritage is often a point of conversation wherever I go.[19] While some identified me as completely foreign, others would assume I am fully Bangladeshi – born and raised in Dhaka, or foreign born. One Uber driver, not being able to identify my accent in Bangla, asked, "*apa, apnar jonmosthan koi?* Where is your place of

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[18] I was raised in Paris and Vienna, the latter the ostensibly most 'liveable' city in the world. Many of my friends and interlocutors would point towards this fact and tease me for having been able to 'survive' Dhaka.
[19] My interlocutor Isa describes me as "light brown".

birth?". He then said yes, he had read my name[20] in the Uber app, and when we had spoken on the phone to arrange my pick-up[21], he could not place my accent, and when he saw me, he also could not figure out my appearance, though he thought I did not look local. This kind of conversation was common, particularly with Uber drivers who could (sometimes) read my Bangali first name and foreign surname.[22] Conversations with Uber drivers were of particular interest and benefit throughout my fieldwork, particularly towards the beginning. Male Uber drivers are most common, and women and men who do not know each other will not speak to each other for long in non-private transport (there is a limit to how long a conversation will go on as it can be considered unseemly/flirtatious after a given point). Consequently, conversation did not happen with all Uber drivers when I was alone in the car. When it did, it was often my foreignness or questions about my mixed heritage that allowed for extensive conversation to take place.

On the one hand, I was able to practise my Bangla and figure out what I am saying correctly and what was coming out rather wrong, allowing me to edit some of my *faux-pas*. My Bangla skills were commented on in diverse ways. While some drivers would remark that I speak rather well, or not realise that I am foreign at all, others would tell me "you understand well but you can't speak properly". With one driver, this was promptly taken as an opportunity for him to talk and tell me about his family and home life. He told me he lived in Kalachandpur, a mixed lower middle-class and working-class neighbourhood situated next to Baridhara DOHS, a gated community under the jurisdiction of the much respected national army, largely, but not solely, occupied by army employees. While driving, he pulled out photos of his two children on his smartphone and handed it to me, asking me if I found them cute. He then told me about how his wife and he had an arranged marriage – as opposed to a "love marriage", having come from nearby villages in Borishal, a region in southern Bangladesh. He pointed to a high-rise building down the road we were driving and said, "her village was that far away from mine." He said they do not fight and get along well, and then asked me if I think having an arranged marriage is bad. These kinds of questions often came up during my Uber rides, though a more frequent one was how I find people in Bangladesh (*"amader manush kemon*

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[20] Priyanka is common in both Bangladesh and India, and it is decidedly Bangali.

[21] This is common in Dhaka. Drivers want to ascertain the exact pick-up location, partly due to inaccurate maps of the city, partly due to not being able to or not wanting to use online maps while driving; the purpose is also to figure out where exactly the passenger is going and whether the driver wants to go there, or whether it makes financial and logistical sense for them to drive there at all. Calling an Uber car or motorcycle is thus very much a process of negotiation.

[22] Impossible to pronounce, often even in Austria where it is from.

lagtase?"). More than my responses, these questions are significant in that they highlight my foreign identity.

Questions of my language competences and my identity also proved very much interlinked with the politics of language and identity of Dhaka. Another Uber driver, in whose car I spent a four-hour trip from Gulshan to Dhanmondi and back, told me that I speak very well and he pointed out that my pronunciation was misleading at times as it sounded quite local (though I was slower with forming sentences). He was very aware of his accent in English, having lived and worked as a driver in the Gulf as well, and remarked that pronunciation is very important.[23] This conversation also reflected, in my view, the politics of language among Dhaka's middle and upper-classes. I pointed to this briefly in Rani's case, who was teased by her Bangla medium friends for her Bangla at times. Being teased and looked down upon for one's English or not being able to speak English is also a common experience and a colonial heirloom that haunts life and social dynamics in Dhaka, which is also a subject of much joking. Incidentally, there were one or two moments when my ability to speak English was questioned, but I would not experience it in the same way as someone who had grown up with these dynamics. Having gone to a Bangla medium, an English medium or international school (and within these there are hierarchies too, which I describe in more depth in chapter three) is thus in many ways a definitive experience. The remarks of the Uber driver on the classification of 'proper' and well-pronounced English consequently reflects wider social issues, reflecting on post- and neocolonial dynamics that are part of life in the contemporary capitalist world, so driven and shaped by the totalising experience of the colonial machinery. My conversations with Uber drivers thus were reflections not only on my identity and my life. Rather these conversations allowed me to reflect on my identity and my positionality as part and parcel of the negotiations of identity, class, and (post-neo) colonialism that is alive in Dhaka and the world, and very much through the processes of (North to South) research.

Though all ethnographers are indebted to particular people – partners, family members, friends, gatekeepers – I found that my relationships developed in particular ways, as did my self-perception through these relationships, during my fieldwork and in the process of writing this thesis. My conversations with my mother are a pivotal example. In her introduction to *Veiled Sentiments*, Abu-Lughod (1986) describes how her father's presence when she entered

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[23] This reminded me of the painful, mean and often racist way that 'correct' pronunciation and expression is policed, particularly in English. Being a native speaker often isn't enough to qualify one as fluent in English. Particular markers such as an identifiable accent (British, American, etc.), 'appropriate' citizenship, class markers, and often also white skin and Christian names are required to qualify as a native speaker of English.

her field, a Bedouin community in Egypt, was crucial in legitimating her presence and confirming her trustworthiness. In a similar vein, my mother's presence and that of my family, were important not only for legitimating my presence as a researcher, but for understanding Dhaka and my encounters there. She thus appears at times throughout this thesis, to draw attention to my positionality, and to our relationship as a mediator of my experience of Dhaka and the knowledge that I am here creating.

Another 'protagonist' in my ethnography is Isa, one of my closest friends and interlocutors, who played a critical role in my ethnography. He appears at multiple points throughout this thesis, not so much due to sharing his own experiences but more because he introduced me to many of my other friends (in one case even one of my own family members that I had previously not met). I highlight when he was the main facilitator of introductions between my interlocutors and myself. I believe the trust they had towards him made them feel more comfortable with me as well. Researchers are all over Dhaka and Bangladesh, as in many parts of the Global South. Distrust towards them, or rather 'us' researchers, particularly if coming from abroad, is normal. In all instances with my interlocutors, I attempted to make my own positions clear and would of course share as much of my own experiences and (non)beliefs as people asked of me. It was important for me to maintain a relationship of exchange and not only of 'extraction'. Isa was not only important in introducing me to people, but also in helping me develop close and honest connections to my friends and interlocutors. His presence was always comforting and a great facilitator of informal yet rigorous discussion.

Isa also played a crucial role in helping me digest and understand my everyday encounters, also outside of interviews and experiences I categorised as 'formal' research. On the one hand, I did not grow up in Dhaka so many sayings, jokes, comments, events would unfold in unfamiliar ways. Isa, and my mother, were kind listeners and allowed me to discuss these occurrences without judgement (albeit with plenty of mockery at my expense). For example, one evening I was having dinner with my *boro* Khalu (my maternal aunt's husband) and *boro* Khala. As we finished, Khalu announced that he would go to pray now. Jokingly he turned to me and said, "I'm not like you, I don't have a special arrangement with God," referring to my lack of prayer and practice (and fear of judgement at the end of time). I told Isa about this, to which he answered, "Yeah, that's something people say to younger people who don't pray." What for me would have appeared as a rather isolated moment of poking fun, actually turned out to be a common exchange, through Isa's interpretation. Like my mother then, Isa appears throughout this thesis. I highlight his presence in my work, and his role as a 'gatekeeper' and friend throughout my research.

As someone who deals with at times quite severe social anxiety, which in Dhaka was compounded by my shame over not being fluent in a language which I often think of as my should-have-been mother tongue, (over)analysing social situations is a daily habit. In Dhaka, this process of analysing all daily encounters, sites, sounds and smells, was the crux of my job as a researcher. And to do it with complete awareness of ethics and reflexivity and at all times, further exacerbated an already rather stressful condition of social anxiety. My conversations with friends like Isa and Mohua, a fellow researcher in Dhaka's arts and cultural scene, during fieldwork allowed me to reflect on myself and my encounters, and to think about my work and the narratives of my interlocutors in novel ways.

My unease in any sort of transport and forward motion that does not exclusively involve control through my feet is a case in point. If I am feeling panicked and unwell when driving on an underground train in London, in a plane flying over the Atlantic, or in a car driving through Dhaka, is it due to mental conditions, learned behaviours, and self-formations that occurred beyond my knowledge – but for which I am nevertheless responsible? Or do I feel these things because my body has reasons of its own and simply does not like these conditions. Where, in short, does my body end and my mind begin? These self-conversations always lead me to the rather obvious conclusion, at least for most people dealing with embodiment: there is no boundary between the two. It is through my own body and experience of self that I use the idea of the body/self in my thesis, that I consider the effects of spatiality, temporality, place, and experience in forming who we are.

Being honest about myself, about my experience, and my positionality in this thesis, and my work in general, is part and parcel of a more broadly conceived decolonial approach that I endeavour to follow. I have tried to integrate this into my methodology from the start of my fieldwork. In this thesis, I continue to refer to my own positionality and experience, to people like my mother and Isa, to allow this approach to come to not only stand as a political statement at the beginning of this thesis. Rather, I want it to permeate my work. I similarly use a broad range of literature, making sure to balance the voices of my interlocutors with the theoretical input of academic authors and scholars of all genders, class and cultural backgrounds, and colours. As I am writing about Dhaka and lives lived there, I also make an effort to include writers from Bangladesh and Bengal, in terms of academics, researchers, artists, thinkers, architects, poets and authors, writing in both Bangla and English. I thus hope to present a view of Dhaka which, though clearly influenced by my subjective position and analytical perspective, is nevertheless grounded in the experiences of my interlocutors, the

spaces of the city, and the understandings and perspectives of the people who have grown in this city, and who, through their work, contribute to its richness.

Outline

This thesis is structured into five core chapters. The concepts introduced in this chapter are further elaborated on in the following conceptual framework. While here I laid the foundations of a phenomenological approach to class, religion and secularity, the city, feeling and the self, I expound on these core themes in greater detail in chapter two. I show how these themes are interrelated through their materiality and the bearing this has on my interlocutors' experiences as upper middle-class Muslims in Dhaka.

Chapter three introduces the city space of Dhaka and provides a more detailed sense of the materiality of the city and how it connects class and religious-secular experience. I situate the experiences of my interlocutors in the physicality of the city, developing a material and embodied understanding of religion, self and place. It is here that I argue for the dialectic relationship between space, class and religiosity through a discussion of the physical environments my interlocutors are embedded in. Thinking through the city and its spaces brings the material and experiential nature of class and the religious-secular to the fore and shows how different identities play into religious-secular negotiations through embodied interactions with space.

Chapter four then explores the idea of moral negotiation as a means for my interlocutors to explore their faith, doubts, certainties and uncertainties. I focus on negotiation of space and relationships as a conscious act to delineate religious-secular difference, between individuals and within themselves. Here the divisions between the religious and cultural domains, so stringently and paradoxically upheld within the liberal secular framing of religion in Bangladesh, are further deconstructed. The focus here is on the process of moral negotiations that are part and parcel to religious-secular experiences for people personally, but also as a class very much situated in Dhaka today.

Chapter five takes the idea of moral negotiation further by moving into the domain of spatial orientations. Rather, my interlocutors are oriented and orient their religiosities by the spaces they inhabit, both private and public. Here I take up the notions of the conservative and the liberal, very commonly used terminology in Dhaka to self-identify, identify others, and to describe what can (should) and what cannot (should not) happen within a particular space or place. It is in this way that I explore both how my interlocutors are changing, developing and orienting themselves and their religiosity, whilst also orienting the spaces they inhabit. It is in

this way that different religious-secular aspirations, not just for individuals but for the spaces and communities they inhabit, encounter one another. Orientation is thus not only a process of individuation, but one of social making.

Finally, in chapter six I explore how Dhaka, its inhabitants and their religiosities are constituted by experiences of religion-secularism elsewhere, across material space and across time. Whilst my interlocutors are part of classes and communities specific to Dhaka and Bangladesh, they are also very much connected to the wider world through systems like global capitalism, discourses like religion-secularism, as well as the discursive tradition of Islam and the global *ummah*. I argue that transnational living and travel provide a form of worlding that is specific to the middle and upper-classes, and which also forges particular senses of Muslim identity through belonging to the world. These experiences of worlding are very much mediated through encounters and orientations with spaces abroad. I argue that this worlding is important to orienting my interlocutors' personal religiosities, as well as to their encounters with and orientations through spaces back home in Dhaka. This spatial focus, I argue, allows us to see how personal aspirations and aspirations for society are a complex imbrication of religious and classed experiences of being part of the world.

Chapter seven concludes the thesis by highlighting (a) that class is spatially manifested, (b) how class is affecting the way religious-secular becoming takes shape for my interlocutors in Dhaka, with a particular move to a focus on their feelings, and (c) how the city is an experience mediated by a collage of classed spaces that are, however, crossed and bridged by people of different classes moving between them. Looking at space, class and the religious-secular together provides a way for us to think about orientations, change and difference as processes that are at once social, personal, material, agentive, rational, emotional, divine and fateful. This is important to bear in mind if we are going to learn to talk about Muslim interlocutors in the anthropology of Islam and religion as not only Muslim, and not only aspiring to a coherent self. I elaborate how my work lays the ground for future work in studying interfaith and interclass relations, particularly in plural urban contexts and cities, like Dhaka, growing under the pressures of national middle income development.

Chapter 2: A material and spatial approach to religious-secular experience

Zara Mami was an upper middle-class woman in her forties, who had been born and raised in Dhaka, tertiary educated, had degrees from prestigious universities in Dhaka and the UK, was married with three children, and was at the time of our meeting finishing her PhD abroad in Indonesia as well. She described to me how she started saying her prayers differently after attending university in Dhaka, and being surrounded by friends and embedded in a space in her dorms where she could say her prayers, but where she felt no pressure to do so - no one asked but everyone said their prayers in their own time and way. Later when she went to study in Indonesia for her PhD, she found a similar dynamic and relationship to prayer amongst other Muslim students. While she adapted her dress and veiled in Indonesia, she also felt that the relationship to prayer and practice was different to what she was used to amongst her class and peers in Dhaka. When she returned to Dhaka, she stopped veiling, though her sense of dress changed, something she did not ascribe to situational veiling and gendered practices, but to a feeling within.

Zara Mami's story brings to the fore her plural identity as an upper middle-class parent, partner, working professional, academic, woman, Muslim, from Dhaka while having lived abroad also. Her narrative exemplifies the heterogenous and material nature of class in particular, and the plural points at which it intersects with religious-secular becoming. At the same time, not only her story but her focus on feeling encouraged me to pursue feeling and its relation to experience and becoming. Feeling, here, is part and parcel of experience and gives way to new orientations and religious-secular becomings, entirely tied up with but not the same as moral and ethical reflection.

I begin by elaborating on the nature of class as material but not necessarily defined by commodities alone, providing a general map of the differences between being middle and upper middle-class in Dhaka. Drawing on theories of the urban environment, I relate my conception of class to the materiality of urbanity, particularly the materiality of Dhaka. What I work towards is a sense of class as spatially defined.

I then expand on how religion is lived and embodied, and the ways in which class and the spatiality of the city affect the way religious-secular becoming can take shape. As much of the work in the anthropology of Islam has been dedicated to processes of self-formation and subjectivation, I relate the process of becoming to debates around subjectivation. These fundamentally presuppose a connection between bodies and religious-secular formations. I expand on these to show how my interlocutors in Dhaka are not beholden to one kind of

subjectivation, but rather how their feelings give way to different trajectories and modes of becoming. Here I elaborate on feelings, their relevance to my interlocutors and their stories, as well as the significance of centring feelings and their relations to space and objects when thinking about religious-secular becoming.

My aim is not to overstate specific feelings as particular to the upper middle-class or necessarily to Dhaka or even to the Sunni Muslim 'community' I worked with. The point is rather to show how my interlocutors' feelings relate to the spaces they inhabit - invariably very classed spaces - and how their religious-secular becomings are shaped by these feelings. My goal is to bring together both the socially determined, the potentialities of the self, God, Islam, faith, the secular and perhaps also make space for something like fate. This way, I hope to shed light on the way my interlocutors, like Zara Mami, are both shaping and shaped by the spaces of Dhaka they live in, religious texts and experiences, their personal histories, as well as being shaped by something potentially beyond the self and the social, whether this is God/divine, fate or otherwise.

Class and Urban Experience

Azia and Laleh were two young professional working women in their 30s living in Gulshan and (intermittently) working in Dhaka's thriving development sector, an industry providing ample (if highly competitive) opportunities for middle-class, white collar workers. I met both through my friend Isa, who had also been doing his PhD research in Dhaka one year prior. Both Laleh and Azia lived in the same upper-crust neighbourhood and attended prestigious, English-speaking private schools and universities in the city, with Laleh having studied abroad as well for some time. Both Azia and Laleh had access to the same neighbourhoods, spaces, education, knowledge and material goods within Dhaka (and outside of Bangladesh). They had both also explored Islam and different religions in acute depth – by going through phases of dedicated religious study, saying prayers every day, and fasting diligently – Laleh's explorations had fortified her faith and her practice as a Muslim, whereas Azia found herself not to believe anymore, now identifying as an atheist. What they did share are the spaces they frequented for leisure, education and the possibilities to explore their own faith as well as other religions in detail. Their stories draw attention to the materiality and plurality of class experiences.

I do not wish to suggest that Azia experiences Dhaka in exclusively secular ways, or exclusively religious modes for Laleh. Rather, by attending to their feelings and experiences of religion through their classed experiences of space, I propose to trace how religion and the secular are part of a discourse that is prevalent amongst the broader middle and upper-classes

in Dhaka. It is people's feelings, particularly towards specific spaces, that can show us how this binary discourse is underwritten by an experience of these categories (religion-secularity) as mutually forming and leading to what I have called religious-secular becomings.

I think of class as particularly constructed in Dhaka as well as part of global power hierarchies. I do not make a case for my interlocutors' religious-secular experiences as singular simply because they come from similar class backgrounds. Rather, I elaborate how feelings, memory and relations to space can show how the religious and the secular are experienced together. The discursive terms of religious-secular identification are shared across the middle and upper middle-class and articulated as dichotomies – liberal (secular) / conservative (religious), - but religion and the secular are essentially not experienced as binary. Class is integral to the experiences that my interlocutors can have, to the way they can move in space, what they can do and what they cannot, what experiences are or are not available to them, thus affecting what kinds of becomings they will go through.

Laleh's and Azia's ability to 'try out' different religions, whether as believers/practitioners or out of scholarly interest, is very much rooted in their access to resources and a shared commitment to self-education, something all my interlocutors practised in their own ways. The conditions for Laleh's and Azia's explorations were the same, but the outcome was in some ways quite different, with Laleh finding more faith in Islam and Azia letting hers go or being left by hers completely. While they have chosen or been drawn towards different religious-secular becomings, their experiences overlap through the similar class and gendered relations they are imbricated within in Dhaka.

I identify my interlocutors, like Laleh and Azia, as upper middle-class. But identifying people as belonging to particular classes is complex. Bourdieu's (1972, 1979) understanding of habitus – habits, skills, feelings thought of as singular to particular cultures, hence making them discrete and allowing them to sustain – as creating the tastes and distinctions of different classes is important, but it does not account for the complexity in class identification. Social mobility, as a non-linear process, is not adequately accounted for in Bourdieu's work. Whereas particular classes in specific contexts may have unique tastes, live in particular neighbourhoods, occupy particular places, behave in particular ways, people moving between classes also brings about change and difference to these, complexifying the distinctions.

Broadly speaking, class in Bangladesh is materially understood through one's family lineage, land and property ownership, level of disposable income, housing and neighbourhood, mode of habitual transport, clothes and, importantly, shoes. Wearing good, well-made Bata shoes (a French brand) is considered a sign of being middle-class, but wearing shoes from

abroad is instantly recognised (and often leads to market vendors and *rickshah* drivers charging more). Class is also understood in terms of markers like education level, where this was received, where one travels for holiday, place of work, or which languages one speaks and one's manner of speaking Bangla as well as English. On the one hand, being upper middle-class was signified by being able to afford new or different things with time, such as travelling abroad for holiday, while not necessarily being born into this level of wealth, even though being born into a middle-class family was necessary in order to become upper middle-class. Upper-class, on the other hand, means coming from landowning families, being able to subsist on familial wealth without necessarily seeking employment, and having regular access to education and leisure abroad. All these markers are nuanced and I expand on them more fully in chapter three. Here I categorise my interlocutors as upper middle-class according to the social mobility of their families and markers that I have listed here, but also due to their access to specific spaces.

Sanjay Srivastava has compellingly argued that the middle-class in India specifically is an "amorphous" category (2009: 338). He argues that particular spaces are used (by the state and inhabitants) to propagate a certain kind of global-oriented, consumerist modernity that is forming classes according to the spaces they access and things they (can afford to) consume. My approach to modernity throughout this thesis is generally one which sees class and class mobility in terms of access to spaces, particularly in Dhaka city but also to spaces abroad, for business, medical travel and leisure. Modernity in this instance sees progress in terms of class, which is economic but also significantly more when considering access to spaces of leisure, education, healthcare, amongst many others. Space consequently both expresses and is formative of my interlocutors and their experiences as classed subjects (cf. Low 2011, 2016). Laleh and Azia had access to the same kinds of schools in Gulshan, Dhanmondi and Baridhara (all upmarket neighbourhoods), where the student and teacher communities are very much connected. They would also know and go to the same places for food and coffee, and they were also working and moving across the same professional workplaces and networks.

While I do not define my interlocutors as a homogenous class, what I would say of all of them is that they are privileged even if in varying ways. All of them will have access to roughly the same spaces. However, many have particular feelings towards specific neighbourhoods, shops, restaurants, bars and homes which orient them towards or away from such spaces. Partly this is related to specific self-definitions of what kind of middle-class person one is. But gender is also very much imbricated with class experiences. Azia, who drinks habitually, speaks English fluently and enjoys spending her time in a mixed crowd of

Bangladeshi and foreign 'expat' workers, feels comfortable attending the exclusive 'expat' bars in Gulshan. But many would feel uncomfortable about not fitting into these environments, while others, not concerned about fitting in, are simply religiously and/or politically disinclined from going there due to drinking or the exclusivity of the environment. Many local bars in Dhaka tend to be very male spaces. The expat bars offer upper middle and upper-class women (particularly) a way to enjoy alcohol or simply the experience of sitting in a bar in a more 'inclusive' environment. My focus is thus more on class in terms of the feelings of my interlocutors towards particular spaces. In this sense, I do not propose conceptualising my interlocutors as of a 'new' middle-class, though understandings of this term are very much reflected in the conditions of my interlocutors who inhabit Dhaka today.

In *India's New Middle Class*, Leela Fernandes explores the role of India's new urban middle-class, politically constructed to function as a "proponent of economic liberalization" (2006: xviii). They are not 'new' in the sense of being newly socially mobile, having just entered the middle-class. Rather, 'new' is understood in terms of their specific social and political identity that is tied to particular benefits of liberalisation. Largely this class will include individuals from English-speaking backgrounds, who have had access to English as well as foreign higher education, in white-collar jobs, who have access to new employment opportunities, for instance within managerial positions in multinational companies or within the technology industry.

Similar processes are visible in Dhaka and other Bangladeshi cities. Local companies, particularly in the development, ready-made garments, pharmaceutical, telecommunications and software industries, as well as foreign-based organisations, operating in diverse areas like development, construction and logistics, are providing a range of jobs to house the growing middle and upper middle-classes. In *The New Pakistani Middle Class,* Ammara Maqsood (2017) describes how similar business and new employment opportunities have become available to members of the new middle-class as Fernandes (2006) describes, though economic precarity and the lack of available financial support through families leaves this segment in a position of insecurity compared to members of the old middle-class, who are similarly working in the private sector.

With these opportunities comes a range of new processes of and products for consumption, tastes, interests, skills, credentials and cultural resources. Many of my interlocutors are passionate leisure travellers, while also going abroad for medical treatment. Saif Mama and his wife, a middle aged couple living with their teenage daughter in Bashundhara, enjoyed travelling on yoga retreats. This is both a question of affordance and the

development of globalising middle-class values of living a nurturing, healthy life. Fernandes also directs us to these new points of distinction, which are both based on material consumption as well as skills, ideas and religious practices (or the lack thereof) (2006: xvii). Coupled with this are also social hierarchies that are internal to class, such as region, religion, or language/dialect (ibid.: xviii).

In the context of Dhaka, Hashim Mama, a friend of Saif Mama, and I often spoke about all the different kinds of Bangla one can hear in the city. Being able to speak *Shuddho Bangla*, for example, a kind of formal way of speaking, is still very much a sign of a good middle-class education (Acharya 1995). To Hashim Mama, and many others, it sounded sterile, too 'proper', and not reflective of the various and often creative uses of everyday Bangla, as he often told me. It is also not always understood, as the wording can be very particular and not within the vocabulary of all people and classes. But not, at least, knowing how to speak Bangla 'well' is also considered a sign of bad education or lacking amongst the middle-classes. I often heard people making fun of others for speaking either more English than Bangla, or mixing the languages (too much).

Maqsood (2017), in contrast, moves away from economic liberalisation and elaborates instead on the socio-cultural and religious concerns of her interlocutors as markers of their class positions. While the new middle-class are inhabiting the city and religious life in novel ways, particularly through approaches based on individual ethical formations and Quranic prayer groups, the old middle-class, and particularly older generations, are marked by nostalgia for the cultural life of the city, something very much part of the stories of my older interlocutors in Dhaka, which I explore further in chapter three.

Maqsood (2017), Srivastava (2009) and Fernandes (2006) unanimously shift away from an exclusive focus on class as consumption, particularly in terms of buying commodities. While Bourdieu's (1984) work on how commodities and consumption produce and reproduce social classes, via 'taste', an over-reliance on materialised commodities or visible display risks overlooking the importance of more nuanced forms of class belonging. Srivastava's approach to thinking of classes as formed through the spaces they are accessing offers an interesting way to maintain the focus on materiality while also thinking about the specific ways they are forming classed subjects. Maqsood's approach considers how specific religious practices are forming classes and the kinds of subjects they are becoming. The point then is not to describe how a specific class is forming religion or taking on religious-secular practice, but how these practices themselves are affecting the people of these classes. Together, religious-secular becoming and access to space provides a means to think about class as formed experientially.

Space and City

Zara Mami, a middle-aged interlocutor and good friend of my maternal aunt and uncle, had lived in multiple cities in and outside of Bangladesh. At the time we met, she was finishing her PhD at a university in Indonesia, where she lived intermittently, splitting her life between her family in Dhaka and studies in Indonesia. I had asked her for an interview initially after her husband, Hashim Mama, told me that she prayed in Bangla. Relating to me the different moments or important religious experiences throughout her life (so far), Zara Mami told me of her formative years at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), where she began to pray not with her proselytising roommate, as she emphasised, but with friends on a floor upstairs in the dorm. "People would go and say their prayers, but there was no pressure, nobody forced anyone else." The openly defined environment and space of the upper floor of a dorm of a prestigious public university in Dhaka, situated close to the buzzing campus of Dhaka University, speaks of the way spaces and religious-secular experiences within the city are co-constituted.

To look at spaces like Zara Mami's dorm's upper floor as only a private enclave within the city would not do justice to the kinds of religious-secular experiences that were/are formative for my interlocutors. Rather than overfocus on a private-public spatiality of the city, here I think of the city as a kind of collage of intersecting, overlapping spaces. On the one hand, the material turn in the social sciences is grounded in Marxist approaches to materiality and dedicated to unpacking the human condition not only through the relations shared by humans, but between subjects and objects also. The spatial turn (cf. Foucault 1967; De Certeau 1980; Lefebvre 1991a, 1991b), in a way exemplified this by, broadly speaking, attending to human experiences through the spaces they inhabit or are forced to engage with. De Certeau (1980), for example, wrote of how the city is co-created through the people walking its streets everyday. Studying space has also allowed authors (cf. Harvey 1990; Massey 2005) to situate forms of production (both in terms of economics and knowledge) within the historical, political and social contexts in which they are taking place. Thinking of the city in terms of its spaces equips me with a better means to understand how my interlocutors', like Zara Mami's, religious-secular becomings are forged through spatial encounters, simultaneously allowing for a more fluid conception of the relationality between the objects of Dhaka city (animals, buildings, rooms, mosques, offices, homes, chairs, phones, cars) and its human occupants.

Much of twentieth century readings of the relationship between religion, secularism and the city depicted cities as "epicentres of religious decline" while themselves becoming

"spatialized expressions of secularization" (Burchardt & Becci 2013: 5). Now, of course, scholars are thinking of cities and religion in urban environments in much more dynamic and plural ways (cf. Burchardt & Becci 2015; Janson & Akinleye 2015; Maqsood 2017). My approach is to draw the objects and spaces my interlocutors inhabit into the discussion on how their religious-secular becomings are formed.

Particularly to capture the religious-secular becomings of my interlocutors in a more tangible way, I draw on the spaces of the city, its materiality (food, buildings, parks, restaurants, theatres, cars, *bosti*,[24] buses, CNGs, *rickshahs* and so forth) and its non-human inhabitants (objects, dogs, cats, birds, and *djinn*). Saif Mama, my maternal uncle, would send his driver across town to the Sonargaon Hotel for *jilapi*[25] during Ramadan, sweets he could easily get at every street corner in his neighbourhood. But the particular quality of those *jilapi*, the taste, where they are made (both the hotel and the location), his memories of them, and the fact that he had a driver whom he can ask to pick them up (easily a two hour drive one way during Ramadan traffic) – all these are testament to particular ways of knowing, sensing, remembering and inhabiting the city and experiencing religion, in this case the Holy Month of Ramadan.

My conceptualisation of the city as a space of plurality and unevenness reflects a wider trend in recent scholarship on urbanity. Baviskar (2020) and the contributors to Kuldova and Varghese's (2017a) volume on urban utopias in India critique the political attention drawn to certain spaces and objects. Baviskar notes the way the metro rail is touted as a particular projection of the modern Indian city (2020: 2). Planners and politicians insist on "expanding certain forms of mobility" (ibid.), rather than improving universal access to amenities like clean water and electricity. The emphasis is on mobility and labour, and on projecting the city as "world-class" (cf. Dupont 2011; Ghertner 2011), rather than meeting the needs of the heterogeneous population of a particular urban environment. Kuldova (2017) similarly explores the effect of 'luxotopias' – enclaves of elite life that simultaneously erase and rely on the poor and marginalised. Though set in different terms, Akhter (2017) offers a scathing critique of the upper-class enclaves of Dhaka – many of which my interlocutors are situated in – how they do not account for the equality of even privileged women, let alone underprivileged people of the same gender, and the neo-colonial dynamics that these spaces create within the city. Together these accounts shed light on how cities are complex, interwoven, relational, textured and fundamentally unequal spaces.

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[24] A slum.

[25] Deep-fried sweets dipped in sugary syrup – found across South and Western Asia, Egypt and Tunisia.

The home space in Dhaka reflects this complexity and unevenness. Azia's home was inhabited by her and her mother on one side of the apartment, along with several young maids, and her father's relatives on the other side. The maids shared one bedroom and were living in a home that was not theirs and where they will likely never feel completely comfortable. "I bought them beds", Azia told me, "but my relatives didn't like this." I do not know the details of this confrontation between Azia and her relatives, but the situation of having live-in maids, which is technically a contractual and professional relationship, is one that brings out a lot of class and familial friction. Having maids and house help, on the one hand, is considered a right of the middle and upper-classes in Dhaka, but how this relationship should take shape is not cut in stone and rarely serves the interest of the employees. This friction is one of the many reasons why working-class women in Dhaka seek work in factories and servicing office buildings rather than work in private homes, along with a threat of violence and incarceration, which many have and continue to experience. But how middle-, upper middle- and upper-class people treat their staff can also be a source of judgement and gossip for others in their familial and social circles.

Writing of more privileged classes, I do not propose to be offering a holistic view of Dhaka and its heterogeneous inhabitants. But neither do I whitewash the experiences of my interlocutors. As Azia's story highlights, they themselves are deeply aware of the tensions between classes, experiences as gendered subjects within Dhaka, as well as between religious groups, or simply people who feel religious differently. It is in this spirit that I draw attention to the complex relationality underlying experiences of the city.

What I aim for is not a universal theory of the city, but rather a conception of it as both globally connected and contextually situated. Robinson (2002, 2008) has made a strong case for thinking of the 'ordinary city' in order to understand urban spaces in the Global South as part of global hegemonic dynamics, but also very much on their own terms. She particularly challenges conceptions of global – "world-class" (Baviskar 2020: 6) – cities, in the vein of Sassen (1991, 2001, 2002), whose work on cities as global economic centres has been influential in defining globalisation as the adaptation of (specific) urban environments to 'global' finance capital. The lives of my interlocutors and their experiences of Dhaka both deeply reflect the aspirations towards being "world-class" both as a class, a nation and a city. But more importantly, they reflect a (desire for) connectedness to elsewhere.

Hashim Mama lived and studied in the US, but returned to Dhaka due to a need to be in the religious and spiritual space of his childhood and youth. Hashim Mama was privileged in the way he was able to move across borders and through Dhaka (with a foreign passport as

well), while simultaneously being oriented in different directions according to his "spirituality" (as he puts it) and experience of particular spaces. It is these experiences that both shaped him as well as the city space of Dhaka, 'worlded' by the bodies moving within and beyond its borders, over and over. This view not just of Hashim Mama as an upper middle-class man but also of Dhaka reflects a sense of the city less in terms of being "world-class" and more as "a compendium of different ways of knowing" (Vasudevan et al. 2002: vii) and experiencing.

Most of the chapters in this thesis focus on a phenomenology of space as it unfolds within Dhaka to capture the religious-secular interplay within the city. In chapter six, however, I attend to Dhaka as part of the world through particular experiences of worlding mediated by religious practice, faith and travel. I use the term worlding to refer to a process by which people inhabiting a particular space and time feel both anchored there, while simultaneously part of impositions from elsewhere. Writing of worlding in African cities, Simone speaks of how external impositions – of what a city is and how urban life should be lived – are experienced and simultaneously mediated by local "redeployments" (2001: 18) of these impositions. There is, then, a sense of connectivity to elsewhere while still being present in a particular space and time. Simone's (ibid.) assessment also draws attention to the often unequal dynamics in worlding cities, as the external impositions are often dictated from the global minority to the global majority.[26] To me, then, there is a sense of connectivity, but also friction through various axes of privilege that create worlding experiences.

What comes together here are memory, nostalgia, affect and feelings – aspects which have become fundamental to how we need to grasp the complexities of the city. Vasudevan et al. (2002: vii) and Baviskar (2020) note how the city is a deeply personal experience of place - memories and daily events and movements are what make the city (ibid.: 1). Taneja (2017) has also shown how interactions between a mediaeval palace in Delhi, people and *djinn* allow for modes of remembering that are transgressive, allowing for people to remember their shared and personal past in ways that cannot be controlled by modernity or the state. The city is shaped by such nostalgias and memories in that they compel people to move within the city and feel in particular ways. It is in this vein that I can speak of Saif Mama's yearning for *jilapis* from the other side of Dhaka or Azia's home partition as both personal and socially privileged, embedded in webs of discourse, materiality and power specific to the city but also connected to the world.

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[26] A more common and popular term today for the (people of the) Global South, particularly favoured by BIPOC activist networks and individuals.

Lived and Embodied Religion

During my first months of fieldwork, I lived with a distant cousin, Zonera and her husband Naveed in Baridhara DOHS, an enclosed neighbourhood largely reserved for and regulated by army personnel, but also inhabited by offices and middle to upper middle-class people. Much of what I learned during my stay in Dhaka is thanks to their teachings and them taking me into their home. We celebrated *Shab-e-Barat*[27] together here, the first time I experienced it as we did not practise it in my home back in Vienna. During the day, I helped Zonera prepare a range of treats and snacks for the night of praying. During our preparations and intermittently throughout the night, she told me how they celebrated *Shab-e-Barat* differently now to when she was a child. She told me that when she was young, she would say her prayers between her brother and father and, when she got older, she and her sister would go to Bailey Road, a popular commercial street in central Dhaka in a middle-class area, to buy treats from the bakeries. It was a family affair that she missed a lot, now only spending the evening with Naveed, as her father had passed and most of her siblings were abroad. She remembered how they would set off fireworks on their rooftop, but due to stricter laws around fireworks in Dhaka city, this was not possible anymore. Thinking of her experience, the city struck me as more than just a physical environment and contestation over public and private domains, while religion is more than simply a set of rituals, practices and beliefs. Rather they are mutually experienced.

My approach to lived religion is very much tied to a desire and need, in anthropology as elsewhere, to understand religion less as an institutional form or in terms of scripture alone, and more in terms of how it is experienced. Marsden's (2005, 2013) ethnographic work on Muslim communities in Afghanistan and North-West Pakistan exemplifies a move to thinking about the moral complexity that is part of Islamic everyday life and practice, but also how contradictions and inconsistencies are part and parcel of being religious (cf. Simon 2009). The everyday has been taken up as an important means for thinking about religious experiences beyond doctrine. However, though I take up so-called 'everyday' experiences of my interlocutors throughout this thesis, my goal is not to erase their Islamic or religious analysis of what they experience (cf. Fadil & Fernando 2015a, 2015b). This approach echoes the emphasis on morality and ethical subjectivation that has been central to theoretical

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[27] Night of forgiveness, celebrated on the 15th of the Islamic month of *Sha'ban*. In Bangladesh, as elsewhere, it is celebrated with a night long of prayers, accompanied by special sweets and foods to keep us going throughout the night.

developments in the anthropology of Islam (cf. Asad 1993; Janson 2013, 2016a; Fadil 2019), which I expand on in more detail below. But in a broader sense of experience, beyond questions of ethics only, the lived religion approach assumes that "[how] people inhabit the religious" individually tends to be vast, plural and "messy" (Mittermaier 2011: 10).

Similarly influenced but not solely guided by questions of ethics, my work with my interlocutors in Dhaka reflects this messiness and how they attempt to make sense of their various identities and desires simultaneously. This was very much mirrored in the way many of them inhabited space and spoke of bodies, particularly those of women. I was visiting one of my *khalas* one afternoon in 2019. I came to her bedroom and found her folding up a beautiful printed silk *sharee* with deities, avatars and characters from Hindu mythology depicted on it. She told me she had bought it in India but found that here (in Dhaka) she could not wear it comfortably in public. "It's such a beautiful *sharee*, but if I wear it to events here, people don't feel comfortable with it." Events here largely meant weddings and family and social get-togethers around Dhaka, amongst an upper middle-class and predominantly Sunni Muslim social circle. Other people's discomfort around other, specifically Hindu, religious depictions became my aunt's discomfort, though she herself would not have minded wearing it, and not because she did not feel religious herself. "I would only wear it to specific places," she told me, referencing her friends' homes where she felt the beauty of her *sharee* would be appreciated over its 'other' religious contents.

My *khala's* story highlights how religious belief and practice and the secular are not only personal, but a commonly shared, requiring negotiation, reflection and analysis. This reflects the kinds of negotiations of the secular and religious, not just in relation to the state but to society more broadly, that are evident in the writings and speeches of local political figures of the twentieth century such as Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or Abul Hashim (Huq 2013a; Nair 2023). What the secular and religious practice should look like has continued to be a debate for civil society organisations, as Mookherjee (2015) describes, as well as for local activist groups (Doha & Jamil 2017). As my *khala's* narrative shows, the religious and the secular continue to be personally and communally negotiated amongst the upper middle-class through everyday artefacts, spaces and encounters. Pre-independence, the ideal of practising Islam with freedom from state oppression and as a *Bangali* person were formative of secularism. Post-independence, and today also, the minority perspective and religious plurality, as Nair (2023) identifies, has come more to the fore. What has become more important to secularism in Bangladesh today are navigating not just differences between the Muslim majority and religious minorities, but also the ways in which Muslims negotiate and deal with markers of

what is religious and what is secular, as the example of my *khala* and her sharee highlight. To some, not only the images on the *sharee* but her wearing it constitute un-Islamic practice, to others it is a sign of a secular Muslim *Bangali* practice, while to others (though few) it is simply a beautiful piece of clothing worn by an upper middle-class woman in Bangladesh.

What also struck me as important to my *khala*'s story, as to many of my interlocutors, was not just how they spoke of religious feelings, experiences and discourses in terms of corporeality, what they could or could not wear, but more where and in which spaces they felt comfortable wearing certain things or behaving in certain ways, like Zara Mami praying on the upper floor of her dorm than in her bedroom. Particularly given the discussions in Dhaka around religious-secular discourses and tensions in the public sphere, such as around the removal of a statue from the supreme court in Dhaka (Khondker 2009) or the clashes between religious and secular groups in Ramna (Raqib 2020), it behoves us to think about how religious-secular experiences (not just tensions) are mediated by space. I espouse an embodied and spatial approach to experiencing the religious and the secular together (cf. Scheer, Johansen, & Fadil 2019).

In this vein, Hancock and Srinivas (2008) offer an understanding of religion that is framed through the "spaces and mobilities" of the urban. Space in this sense is not merely a physical container of social life, rather it is connected to "the discursive, visual, acoustic, material and embodied" forms which religion takes (ibid.: 618-9). They thus propose to explore religious phenomena alongside the "social and material restructuring of urban space" (ibid.). I similarly appropriate the idea of a mutually constitutive relationship between religion and the materiality of city spaces. In the introduction, I outlined how public spaces used for religious gatherings, as well as the politics around building mosques, are points of contention in the city space of Dhaka (Khondker 2009; Steel 2016). However, the connection between religion, the secular and the city space is more complex, more linked to memory, body, self and experience (cf. Dilger et al. 2020). Space also helps capture that rather elusive connection between the religious and the secular in particularly experiential ways.

Rani, a good friend, now in her mid-30s, whom I lived with in her apartment in Bashundhara, negotiated her religious-secular experiences when she said she did not believe in *djinn* or the power of *tabeez* (amulets), yet in their materiality and their boundedness to people and space, both *djinn* and *tabeez* were tangible to Rani, she could feel and experience them. Belief, in this instance, did not matter as much as experience. Here, feelings can shape how an event or moment is experienced, they can be triggered by experience, but they can also simultaneously give way to new kinds of experiences. To describe Rani's experience as

irreligious or secular would seem brash and not to capture Rani's experience in its entirety. Neither does it suffice to call it religious – this is a description she vehemently rejected. Using terms like non-religious also creates more categories, but does not necessarily say much about the experience as it is lived. Instead of focusing on this one facet of her experience, I think about the wider happenings of her life, her class, her history, the schools she went to, the education and professions she has, the neighbourhood she lives in, what her home looks and feels like. It is through this entirety that I trace how the religious-secular is embodied, experienced and formative of spaces and people alike.

While I often use the term religiosities, what is equally important is to consider secularities in the plural. Bubandt and Van Beek's (2012) volume draws attention to the multiple ways in which secularism has taken form across Asian contexts. In Bangladesh and South Asia, for example, the secular is partly thought of in terms of multiple religions being able to coexist comfortably or even harmoniously. But again this is only part of the picture. For some, the secular means pulling religion out of public life entirely. One of my *khalas* once told me that she had heard Austria had banned the *burqa* (broadly construed as a garment covering the whole body, including the face) and that she thought this was a great achievement. In Austria, this would be considered a conservative and far-right stance, often based on arguments of secularity closely tied to ideas of Christian morality. To my *khala*, the *burqa* is an Islamic garment that stifles women and hampers their movement in the public sphere. Rozario (2006) has deconstructed the ways in which the *burqa* actually provides more freedom of movement for women in Bangladesh. My point here is that many secularities exist in a single context.

Religion and the secular are both rather elusive terms, which is why I have sought to hold on to the materiality that undergirds how they are experienced. Religion itself is an unstable analytical category, compellingly unravelled by Talal Asad (1993) in *Genealogies of Religion*. And yet, as Hancock and Srinivas (2008) assert, as a popular category it still "continues to circulate and mark particular bodies, orientations, dispositions and discourses." (2008: 618). Indeed, among my own interlocutors, the Bangla word *dhormo* (which, in my initial fieldwork phase, I tried using) is far less used than the English word *religion.*

I also make a distinction between religion and faith in that they may be linked, but they are not entirely dependent on each other. Arif, a middle aged, upper middle-class professional who was born, raised and worked in Dhaka, moved away from Islam as a religion and gave up practising after his mother passed. But it was only after giving up Islam, finally, that he was

able to believe and connect more strongly to God.[28] To me, this speaks of a distinction between religion and faith, wherein faith speaks specifically to a relationship with God. All my interlocutors spoke of this in some way, though to some a relationship to God was more important than to others.

In a similar vein, the cross-disciplinary scholarship on secularism has shown how religion and secularism are not only experienced simultaneously, but how they are irrevocably linked conceptually. Secularism tends to be studied in terms of its genealogy in relation to religion and modernity in European history (Taylor 1998; Asad 2003; Habermas 2008). Scholars tend to focus on particular principles and relations to the nation-state underlying secularism in order to understand its discursive power. Such terms include peace, in/tolerance, citizenship, democracy, liberty, state, *Laïcité* or minority rights (Taylor 1998; Asad 2003).

Fernando's (2014) and Mahmood's (2015) works have been important in allowing us to see how secularism takes on specific contextual contours, but that these are very much imbricated in a wider network of concepts and meanings that render the secular very much a globalising, if not colonising, force.[29] It is this simultaneous specificity and universality of secularism that has given rise to thinking of multiple secularisms or secularities (Needham & Rajan 2007; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer & VanAntwerpen 2011; Bubandt & van Beek 2012; Rao 2020). These studies assume a distinction of the political doctrine of secularism from the secular, which is characterised "as an ontology and an epistemology" (Asad 2003.: 21). In Asad's genealogy, the latter precedes the former historically, in that it developed as a series of "concepts, practices and sensibilities" (ibid.: 16). Clearly, Asad emphasises that the terms are interdependent.

I attend to my interlocutors' religious-secular experience by focusing on their feelings and the way they interact with and become in the spaces they inhabit. This is in the city of Dhaka and Bangladesh more broadly, along with its host of discourses on religion and the secular. But I also attend to their homes, the streets, markets, and mosques they visit, their work spaces, and their travels abroad. Of course, I was not always with all of them wherever they were, so this is not a voyeuristic attempt at 'participant observation'. Rather, I find the details in their stories as they related them to me.

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[28] Faith in Arabic/the Quran is *Iman*. "Faith is a matter of free choice in Islam but is also considered a gift from God; no one can be compelled to believe" (Esposito 2003).

[29] See chapter one in Mahmood (2015) for a rich account of 'international' human rights and how it is entangled in questions of secularism, religious difference, and minority rights in the context of Coptic Christian communities in Egypt.

In Azia's home, which she shared with her relatives, I saw the glass door partitioning her home into two distinct segments, both along familial lines (her and her mother on one side, and her father's relatives on the other), according to use, but also according to lifestyle, religiosity and habits. I saw the door, I experienced and developed a relationship with it myself (I never crossed over to her paternal family's quarters). But it was only through her stories that I could relate it to religious-secular discourses. They lead very different lives and often there was tension, due to lifestyle or ethical choices. But food, children, maids and work continued to flow across this porous boundary, evoking a much more fluid sense of how religious-secular experiences are imbricated and lived. In this sense, the religious and the secular are not only conceptually but also experientially interdependent.

Ethical Subjectivation

The religious-secular experience that I saw in Azia's home is fundamentally a negotiation of different ways of living and (not) believing and practising Islam. As I outlined in the introduction, I draw on the anthropology of ethics and the good, in particular the works of Joel Robbins (2013, 2016) to think of moral negotiation as integral to the religious-secular experience and becomings of my interlocutors in Dhaka. My point, however, is not to only think about ethical choices. Rather, by speaking of becomings, my aim is rather to think of the process of identification and subjectivation as unbounded. People are always identifying in plural ways. Becoming, in this sense, is to be seen as providing continuous possibility of change and overlapping of identities and experiences, leading to a possibility for exponential difference (Retsikas 2012: xxx). This is a more fruitful way to think about my interlocutors not as becoming singular kinds of Muslim or religious subjects, but rather as continuously transforming (not always for the 'better', not always for the 'worse').

Azia would drink, smoke and dress as she pleased, including in Western clothes and without an *orna* (shawl). She was a young unmarried woman in her mid thirties, educated to tertiary level, working a white collar job, from a Muslim upper middle-class family, living in an owned apartment in one of the most expensive areas of Dhaka. She described to me how she identified as an atheist, using the English term rather than the Bangla (*nastik* – which carries different connotations to the English term) (cf. Kazi 2000). Azia's father was also an atheist, but she felt that their brands of atheism also differed quite drastically, in that she felt he was a "Dawkins" atheist, whereas she preferred not to see the world and others on the terms of the (so called) new atheist movement. Though her father had in certain ways compelled her not to believe in God or follow a religion, she came to this conclusion by her own path, one which

involved a long exploration of diverse religious texts and practices. Many of the conversations I had with my interlocutors spoke of identity and how their feelings and experiences shaped how they practised, or did not practise, Islam (in the past or present). This is the common theme throughout all my chapters.

The anthropology of Islam has largely been occupied with Muslim ethical self-formation following the work of Talal Asad (1993, 2003, 2012). Here I am less concerned with how one kind of subjectivity is developed but rather in how religious-secular becoming is brought about through multiple, intersecting experiences across class and religious-secular identities specifically. It is for this reason that I turn to space (and, later, to feeling). This does not mean that spaces create the same subjects or create subjects in the same way. Isa, Zonera, Hashim Mama and I experienced Ramadan differently within the shared space of Dhaka. I also found myself practising Ramadan and saying prayers throughout *Shab-e-Barat* (the night of forgiveness) in one year when I was staying with Zonera, and then not at all the next year in my *Khala's* home. I cannot explain exactly why. I spoke about this at length with Isa, who did not feel affected by spaces in the same way that I do, but who found my practice in different spaces interesting. My own experience and reflections on my subjectivation are very much part of how I think of subjectivity here, what it is and what it does.

Biehl, Good and Kleinman (2007) have argued that ethnographic theories of subjectivity centred around embodiment can overstate social determinism and over-focus on "questions of domination, resistance, normalization and social identity" (ibid.: 9). The contributors to their volume speak of the "dynamic" qualities of subjectivity (ibid.: 10), the mutual and intersubjective relationship of the collective and the individual, and the relationality of power and meaning as mutually constituting forces rather than opposites (ibid.: 14).

I similarly follow a plural approach to subjectivity, whilst still centring forms of social identity in order to parse their nuances. I describe Azia as upper middle-class, a woman, from a Muslim family, who identifies as atheist. But ending her story there would do little in terms of understanding what these identities mean to her and what her experiences of them, of herself, are. She explained that her lifestyle differed drastically from that of her relatives, who lived across the glass door partitioning their shared home. Looking at the relationality and negotiation taking place across this door provided a means to think about how she is rehashing her identity and positions every day.

Judith Butler's work has been important in theorising the complex interplay of agency and social construction in forming identity and subjects. Drawing on Foucault and Derrida, Butler argued that the subject is formed and gendered through linguistic and bodily acts that

iterate the norms through which they themselves are constituted (Butler 1990, 1999; Shams 2020: 3). In this sense, people are not simply born into systems as subjects, but they are continuously (re)constituted. Butler's notion of performativity is significant in that it highlights how subjects are created by iterating norms through their bodies – this iteration leads to both normativity but is also the locus for change and becoming other/different. Yet Butler's early work in particular largely conceptualised change in terms of a resistance to normativity, a position that has been criticised for presuming what people, in particular women, should desire (Mahmood 2002, 2005; Shams 2020: 4). Thinking of Azia's atheism as a resistance to her father's form of atheism, or of her lifestyle as a resistance to the religious practice and socially conservative values of her relatives, would not leave much space for her thinking and analysis of why she identifies and lives in the way that she does.

To me, the overlapping of identities also provides more fruitful ground for thinking through how different kinds of agencies and social determinants work together in forging religious-secular becomings, rather than just focusing on what would bring about a religious subject. In chapter six, I introduce Samia Khala, an upper middle-class interlocutor in her 50s who had lived all over the world, including Bangladesh, Malaysia, the US and Saudi Arabia. She was Muslim and defined herself as "liberal", while also being a woman, from Dhaka, educated abroad and in local upper middle-class schools, and speaking European, Middle Eastern and South Asian languages. All these identities or markers of identity affected how she believed and practised, and more broadly how she situated herself in Dhaka and in the world.

Samia Khala's example speaks to the relationality of subjects and others, something Mahmood arguably misses (cf. Anderson 2011). In their later works, Butler complimented their idea of the 'political' subject with an ethics of relationality. A subject is thus formed not only by regulatory norms, but also through interdependency, vulnerability and responsibility – an understanding of the self in relation to an other (Butler 2005; Shams 2020: 3, 26). Much like Samia Khala, the plural ways that Azia identifies take shape through previous and continued interaction with people, things and spaces around her, including her relatives, friends, colleagues, maids and, as I argue here, the spaces she inhabits and objects, like the glass door, with which she interacts.

Fundamentally, Biehl, Good and Kleinman (2007) argue that the aim for ethnographic accounts of subjectivation should not be to find a universal theoretical 'solution' (2007: 15). Sarwar Alam (2018) compellingly captures how to think of multiple theories of subjectivity when trying to make sense of processes of subjectivation. Alam's work centres around a group of Muslim women of diverse ages in a rural community in Chandhara, Bangladesh. Drawing

first on Foucault and Geertz (1976), Alam considers the ways in which both thinkers have considered the subject as born into set systems (of power and moral codes on the one hand, and meanings, symbols, and culture on the other) (ibid.: 73-75). Alam considers how power is an experience for his interlocutors, in what ways it makes them as subjects and how they relate to it and (re)produce it through their own agencies. Importantly to Alam is the Euro-centric focus of writers like Foucault and Geertz, among others. He notes that his interlocutors are neither only dividuals (Marriott 1976; Strathern 1988; Busby 1997) nor Kantian individuals – they are both and everything in between and outside of these constructs. Alam's interlocutors in Chandhara are imbricated in plural religious, political and socio-cultural practices, further complexified through their personal stories, feelings, genders, ages and socio-economic background. While all are Muslim, Islam is not monolithic, but practised and experienced plurally (Alam 2018: 96).

I do not propose to similarly identify my interlocutors in Dhaka as religious, Muslim, atheist or otherwise by going through a range of forms of subjectivation. What is more fruitful to understanding their religious-secular becoming is to think about the ways my interlocutors negotiate their identities and how this is integral to religious-secular experiences. To understand more fully the connections between religious-secular becoming and class, I turn to space and Sara Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenology. The attention to feelings that space and queer phenomenology provide offer a means to think through my interlocutors' conscious ethical and moral processes, as well as the way they are continuously oriented by their relations to others and their surroundings, here the spaces of Dhaka, towards varied religious-secular becomings.

Feeling

Feelings played a central role in how my interlocutors spoke about their religious-secular experiences. Rani, whose story and home were central at the beginning of this thesis, would tell me that she can "feel" *djinn* in her home. "Sometimes I can feel them sitting on me or touching my ankle." On the phone years later, she would tell me, "I feel more connected to God now." Feeling was important now only to how she described her experience, but to the experience of being religious also. She was not alone in this.

The feelings I describe throughout this thesis are of various kinds, ranging from the tactile sensations Rani describes when feeling *djinn* to Zara Mami not knowing why she veiled in one place but not another due to a feeling inside. I situate my work in the affect-emotion gap (Schmitz & Ahmed 2014; White 2017), which emerged out of a dependence on Massumi's

notion of affect as indefinable, unconscious 'intensities' (Massumi 2002; White 2017: 177) and emotion as collective and linguistic definitions of embodied experiences (Rutherford 2016: 286). The anthropology of affect specifically has been trying to give way to experience by thinking of motivation not as narrative, but as a "momentum and force" (White 2017: 178). The anthropology of emotion has similarly been trying to grasp experience by taking seriously the emotionality of ethnographic subjects and worlds, as well as of ethnographers themselves. Affect theory tries to understand what we (people) feel while looking at emotion is an attempt to capture how we make sense of what we feel (ibid.: 177). Turning to feeling is my attempt to move between both the unspoken, indefinable 'intensities' and the ways my interlocutors try to define and make sense of them. I hope in this way to speak to something that is deeply personal and real to each of them, but also to convey how feeling is fundamental to the upper middle-class in Dhaka today in their religious-secular becomings.

Feelings shape experience and are particularly present in the relationship between bodies and space. Writing in the context of a history of emotions in South Asia, Margrit Pernau (2014) speaks of particular emotions becoming attached to specific spaces in Delhi. As Khan (2015) notes, such a turn to space and emotion does not only shed light on the historical context within which emotions are or were felt, but also on the politics of the transformation of these emotions in contemporary South Asia. Chatterjee, Krishnan and Robb (2017) have further argued that emotions felt within South Asian cities, in the past and now, can tell us how people imagine their futures, both on their own terms and mediated by dominant discourses. Certain feelings are politically charged and commonly felt at particular times and in relation to particular spaces (Pernau 2014; Khan 2015). What is important is to attend to both subjective, individual experiences and emotions, as well as what they can tell us about the broader conditions of contemporary South Asia, or, in this case, Dhaka.

Zara Mami, who liked praying on the upper floor of her dorm, and who habitually said her prayers in Bangla, rather than the more usual Arabic, described how she liked and enjoyed praying on this floor with her friends. She also told me how later in life, at another university in Indonesia, she felt compelled and comfortable wearing the veil, which she did not do at home. She explained that she assumed she would continue veiling in Dhaka, but then did not. She did not know why, "It was just a feeling." These kinds of feelings are important not only for understanding the individual, personal religious-secular experiences of my interlocutors, but also for understanding how they are constantly interacting with Dhaka, the city and the spaces within it. Their feelings are an important part of how they end up being in the city, how Dhaka shapes them and how they shape Dhaka in return. I draw on Ahmed's (2006) queer

phenomenology specifically to show how spatial experiences orient people and their religious-secular becomings in both socially-conceived, personal and divine or fateful ways.

Ahmed brings together the creative relationship between objects and subjects through feeling. She brings objects to the foreground of experience, rather than leaving them to linger in the background (2006: 4). Drawing on Merleau-Ponty and Husserl, Ahmed argues that consciousness is shaped by what appears before it, the objects in the world around it. Ahmed contends:

> …consciousness itself is directed or oriented toward objects, which is what gives consciousness its "worldly" dimensions. If consciousness is about how we perceive the world "around" us, then consciousness is also embodied, sensitive, and situated. This thesis does not simply function as a general thesis, but can also help show us how bodies are directed in some ways and not others, as a way of inhabiting and dwelling in the world (2006: 27).

From this viewpoint, objects become points of orientation, which propel subjects along particular or different paths according to the feelings the encounter with particular objects affect. Space is also oriented and the body is oriented in certain ways more than others (ibid.: 15). For example, growing up or living in a space that privileges a heterosexual/heteronormative orientation requires the body to be oriented along this line. But it is precisely by encountering the same objects differently, by being oriented otherwise, that other ways of becoming and identifying emerge. As Butler describes, becoming a subject, in this sense, is very much about the acting body – "the 'doer' is invariably constructed in and through the deed" (1999: 181). Ahmed draws our attention to the feelings that affect the doing, and the fact that we are drawn to and oriented by some objects more than others.

When Zara Mami was studying at BUET, she described that she had a roommate who would say her prayers and encourage Zara Mami to do the same. She ended up making other friends and found the space on the upper floor of her dorm, where people would pray, eat, study and hangout. Here she would say her prayers, feeling comfortable to do so. She was drawn to the space and the way that people went about saying their prayers. The space in this sense is both physical and also relationally constructed. She spoke about it as a very formative experience. My understanding is that the space drew her in and oriented her towards a particular kind of religious-secular becoming.

'Looking' at the space of the upper floor of Zara Mami's dorm, it is clear that space is both physically and relationally constructed. The feelings that she describes, the feeling of being drawn to something, are both to the materiality of the space and the plural relations it engenders. Wardhaugh (1999) has described how to some extent spaces determine bodies or are made just for particular ones. Despite these limits, which can be felt, many kinds of bodies can inhabit different spaces. Activities happening in the context of given relationships within a space "reflect and/or subvert ideas about gender" (ibid: 92). So even though what we do affects what we can do, for example – Zara Mami choosing to enter the upper floor of her dorm allows her to say her prayers there and to relate to her religious practice differently – there are multiple possibilities for being in space and being affected by it. When bodies inhabit spaces differently, or inhabit new spaces, new orientations begin and spaces and bodies change (Ahmed 2006: 62). In other words, the upper floor dorm space offered possibilities for Zara Mami's becoming, but her inhabitation of the space, how she prayed and spent time there, also changed the space.

The anthropology of emotions has similarly drawn on the body, resituating it by highlighting the social and cultural constitution of emotions (cf. Rosaldo 1989; Abu-Lughod & Lutz 1990); how bodies and senses are connected to emotions; and how anthropologists can build emotions and the senses into ethnography (their own as well as their interlocutors'). Emotions, feelings and senses are linguistically intertwined, but together also are the stuff of experience. Experience is not only about being conscious – thinking, judging, evaluating, figuring things out – but formative of who we are through emotions, feelings and senses. I follow feelings partly due to the wording used by my interlocutors, but also because it captures something of the indefinability of affect versus the very linguistically and socially defined nature of emotion. These feelings are often very hard to describe in words, though we continue to try. Zara Mami said she did not know why she veils in one city/country and not in another. Rather, it was a "feeling inside". She felt like this is how she should do it. This does not mean that nothing in her dress changed on her return to Dhaka, but it did not happen in the way she expected. It is in describing these kinds of experiences in particular that feelings are worth attending to.

Though not working in anthropology, Ahmed speaks of emotion as a means to understand how things (specifically, objects) are given value over time, and how histories precede and orient the encounter between bodies (Schmitz & Ahmed 2014: 97). The way that Zara Mami speaks of being drawn to and feeling comfortable in the space of the upper floor of her dorm has had a profound effect on how she feels religious now and how she practises Islam.

Zara Mami's narrative has been particularly influential for me. Often when trying to understand what I was trying to say here, her words would resonate again. Her story speaks of a feeling inside that inspired or affected or motivated her to act in specific ways. I follow Zara Mami's own wording by focusing on feeling. Her feeling is not only contextually situated and personal, but it opens up the possibility for thinking of religious-secular becoming as a relational process with space. She feels like praying or dressing in certain ways differently in Indonesia, where she was studying, compared to Dhaka. Partly this is due to nostalgia, her histories and experiences, but there is also something very creative in the relation between her and the spaces she inhabits, something that cannot so easily be historically or personally traced. In short, thinking of her experience and feelings allows us to see her religious-secular becoming as personal, historically contingent and alive to other dynamics that are not limited to interactions with other bodies. This, I believe, opens up the space for something like fate, destiny, coincidence and the divine. She does not define the source of her feelings - indeed, none of my interlocutors chose to ascertain definitively where their feelings were coming from.

What Zara Mami's story also highlighted to me is the importance of thinking about religion and the secular together and feelings as related to their simultaneous experience. In their introduction to *Secular Bodies, Affects and Emotions* (2018), Scheer, Fadil and Johansen show how experience has become a common starting point for the study of religion, but not for conceptions of the secular. The editors particularly emphasise the inward-orienting motion of secular feelings (ibid.: 25), specifically those feelings of controlled rationality, and that it behoves us to attend to these in as much as we attend to religious experiences and feelings. In chapters three and six, I discuss how Zara Mami reads the Quran in Bangla, an act that comes through her feelings mediated by space, rather than other kinds of explanations like 'secular' education or even intention. In other words, she does not say that she reads the Quran in Bangla because she believes that it is ethically right, rather she just does. In this reading, looking at how feelings affect the kinds of actions we do and choices we make can add to studies on religious and moral failure, discontinuity and contradictions (cf. Ewing 1988, 1990; Engelke 2004), by moving away from thinking of ethics purely as a matter of conscious reflection.

Conclusion

The material approach I take to religious-secular experience threads its way through the themes that I explore in this thesis. The materiality of class I pursue here allows me to trace a more detailed image of upper middle-class experiences in Dhaka today, not solely dependent on the consumption of specific commodities. The city provides a blueprint not only for the setting that

my interlocutors live in, in other words Dhaka, but it also allows me to engage a sense of class as spatialised experience.

This is further reflected in the materiality of lived religion, where spatiality also helps me understand better the everyday imbrication of religious-secular experiences. Particularly in Dhaka where religious and secular life are very much imagined, academically, as separate experiences that play out in public space, thinking of them together also abrogates a hard distinction between the public and the private.

While I do not propose to follow a specific kind of process of subjectivation, I do think of my interlocutors' religious-secular experiences in Dhaka as underpinned by moral negotiation. I consequently pursue an idea of subjectivation as very much linked to ethical processes, which are not only individually experienced but which are also relational. This is only one aspect of self-formation that takes place through a relational negotiation between people/bodies, spaces, ideas and objects, such as the glass door in Azia's home.

The relationality between people, spaces, ideas and objects takes form through the feelings my interlocutors describe when making sense of their religious-secular experiences. Feelings, I argue through the work of Sara Ahmed (2006), allow me to engage the class and religious-secular identities of my interlocutors, while also understanding their experiences as defined by the spaces they encounter, inhabit and create for themselves. This allows me to consider the relation between the spaces of Dhaka, their identities, personal histories, as well as something potentially beyond the self entirely. This is important for bringing together different layers of experiences that span class, gendered, religious and other identities, while also providing analytical space for that which cannot be ascribed exclusively to either the personal or socially determined.

Chapter 3: Spatialising Class in Dhaka

Sitting in Saif Mama and Farha Mami's living room one day, on a hot May evening during Ramadan, Hashim Mama and Saif Mama were talking about how different Dhaka was in their youth. While Saif Mama had grown up around Khilgao, a lower to middle-class neighbourhood, Hashim Mama had spent his youth in Dhanmondi, a well-to-do area. Both had studied at Dhaka University in Ramna, where they were classmates and formed a lasting friendship. They spoke about how they lived on different ends of the city, yet could easily get on a rickshaw and find each other outside or drop by each other's homes unannounced. Now, due to traffic, crowds, police checks and, of course, the pressures of adult life, this is unthinkable. Both now lived with their families in the upmarket areas of Gulshan and Baridhara, in close proximity to one another. On the one hand, they accepted the relative cleanliness and order, the proximity to upscale eateries, the general aesthetic of an upwardly mobile upper-class life. Yet they bemoaned the character of these areas compared to the spaces they grew up in. Being educated in English-medium schools and living in these affluent areas, Saif and Hashim Mama felt that their children were particularly distant from and bereaved of Bangla and the cultural life of Dhaka.

Though spaces like Dhanmondi, where Hashim Mama grew up, are also planned, expensive and upmarket, Hashim Mama, Maheen, and many of my other interlocutors considered it to be spatially different and somehow more close to Dhaka and its people than the (ironically called) 'tri-state' area of Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara. Saif and Hashim Mama's issues over the different neighbourhoods of Dhaka speak of the intersection of space and class, and questions of the remembered past, lived present and imagined future of the city.

Most of my interlocutors and friends lived in the northern part of the city, in the newer and affluent neighbourhoods of Banani, Bashundhara, Baridhara, Gulshan 1 and 2. None of them grew up in these spaces but moved there due to work or family land and homes having been built there in the final decades of the twentieth century. A lot of planning and state interests are focused on these areas, to the detriment of the development of many others in the city. With a population of 359,000 in 1952, when my mother was born, to a size of 22,478,000 inhabitants in 2022, Dhaka is growing rapidly year by year (Macrotrends LLC 2022). As the population expands, so its morphology and spaces have developed and continue to change.

22% to 25% of Bangladesh's population are economically designated as middle-class (Billah 2020; Sourav 2021). Billah (2020) in particular draws attention to the ways in which class is not only an economic category, but also a way of identifying for people in Bangladesh, as elsewhere. This means that middle-class as an identity category is necessarily fraught and ambiguous. While on the one hand a private driver earning well when having consistent work will describe themselves as middle-class. At the same time, Hashim Mama, a businessman with dual nationality, multiple properties in one of the most expensive areas of Dhaka, with a car and driver of his own would also qualify himself as middle-class. The difference is that the former is entirely dependent on work from people like the latter, and much more prone to precarity once they no longer have work. While a car driver initially self identifies as middle-class due to their social mobility afforded by work and good, Hashim Mama's identity as middle-class is tied to his heritage as being born and raised in a comfortable, propertied middle-class family.

While there is no economic distinction given to an upper middle-class, I use the term here because it was partly debated and brought up by some of my interlocutors, and also because it allows for a better sense of how broad the experiences of being economically middle-class are. By focusing on shifting spaces like Gulshan, Dhanmondi or Baridhara, my intention is not to reassert the importance of these areas, but to evaluate what the space means to my interlocutors and how space, class and religion significantly intersect and mutually constitute one another. More specifically, due to the cost of living in these areas as well as the kind of lifestyle they offer, I construe these areas as upper middle-class enclaves. This does not mean that upper middle-class people do not live elsewhere in the city or that middle-class people do not have access to these spaces. However, the upper middle-class is more grounded here due to greater economic security and often through familial property in the area, gained from the 1950s onwards, which now is close to priceless.

Historically, Dhaka has gone through phases of growth and political importance, as well as relative neglect. Starting as a small trading port on the Buriganga river, to the South of the city, it thrived during the Mughal period, yet waned under the jurisdiction of the East India Company in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was later revived during British Crown rule from the mid-19th century, and gained particular importance during the partition of Bengal in 1905 (until 1911), during which it was the capital of East Bengal. In the last century, throughout both its independence periods (post-1947 and post-1971), the city has undergone much change and much debate remains about how the city should develop for the betterment of public life. Of course, these debates are largely focused around middle and upper-class needs. With these

debates in mind, I develop a sense of the city as I experienced it and as my various interlocutors spoke of it. I introduce a range of spaces to provide a sense of the city, its movements and how people feel towards it as accurately as I can in writing.

This chapter specifically delineates the complex ways in which class in Dhaka is spatialised. To Srivastava (2009), a consumerist, cosmopolitan modernity in urban India is propagating class formations that are specifically tied to the experiences of spaces that people inhabit. I add to this spatial approach to class by linking it to the spatiality of religious-secular experience.

I begin by expanding on the nostalgia for the city of Dhaka that is alive in the conversations I had with Hashim and Saif Mama, as well as several other of my middle-aged interlocutors. I construct the relationship between the spaces of Dhaka South, where many of my interlocutors (and my own family members) grew up and their gradual migration to Dhaka North. I show how class is spatialised through the movements and relations my interlocutors' have to the neighbourhoods and spaces of the city.

I then explain in more detailed ethnography my interlocutors' unease with class definitions. I link my identification of (most of) them as upper middle-class and their unease regarding this class identification (particularly the word 'upper') to the historical developments of the expanding middle-class in Bangladesh more broadly and Dhaka specifically. My aim is not to create reified class distinctions that do not do justice to the various ways in which classes intersect. Rather, I show how class identity has developed and is spatially manifested in Dhaka today.

The spaces of northern Dhaka, where most of my interlocutors lived and/or worked, are particularly affected by spatial manifestations of security measures. Partly these are state-sanctioned responses under the remit of anti-crime and anti-terrorism. At the same time, these relate to a class-based desire for security. Security here is understood as against religious 'fundamentalist' violence, security from other classes, but also, as I show, from the political and economic power structures that govern Dhaka and Bangladesh more broadly. I describe what I call the aesthetics of securitisation and how these are affecting middle and upper middle-class relations to public religious spaces, while simultaneously also further strengthening the binary construct of liberal-secular and conservative-religious spaces, a binary and popular discourse I discuss in more detail in chapter five.

I then explore how sourcing and consuming food during Ramadan indicates a change in middle and upper middle-class consumption habits, giving individuals from these classes more access to the city space, while still working within a class-based discourse around 'clean'

and 'safe' food. The desire for clean food and clean space, in this sense, is an extension of the desire for security. Ramadan and Eid provide a timespace in which food from different parts of the city and public vendors are desired and brought home, with upper middle-class people sourcing food from parts of town that they usually do not have the time or energy to access (largely due to traffic, but also concerns about cleanliness). I use the term 'sourcing' here as many will send workers or drivers to go pick up these foods in heavy Ramadan traffic, which their middle and upper middle-class employers themselves do not have time or energy to do. In this sense, the working and lower middle-classes become mediators between their employers and public space.

On the one hand, middle and upper middle-class are distinguished by their access and desire for specific spaces, but their interests also intersect. What emerges is a sense of the city as both dynamic and layered, while also very much defined by a spatial segregation and, in a sense, overlapping of classes. Looking at these spaces, I show, is a means to explore the plural experiential nature of class and religious-secular becoming, while also laying the ground for exploring religious-secular negotiations and orientations through space in the following chapters.

Fig. 1 Map of Dhaka city and surrounding municipalities (Swapan et al. 2017).

***Dokkhin Dhakar Para*[30]: Nostalgia for a Past Dhaka**

Hashim Mama and I visited the annual Boi Mela (book fair) at Suhrawardy Udyan in Ramna one February afternoon in 2019. All major local publishing houses had set up their stalls under tents, flanked by colourful signs. Along with other famous publishers, Pathak Shamabesh, one of the biggest in the country, had a small hut with glass panelled walls. We walked through the book-filled lanes, sometimes bumping into friends and acquaintances who had also come to see what is new this year. They asked Mama who I was and he said that I was Saif's niece. They responded that then I am all their niece too. As we continued walking, Hashim Mama asked the vendors for a particular book while many offered me the latest romantic Bangla novels. We bought a few books – some classics and then some for my research – and then we got on a rickshah to take us to Puran Dhaka. We rode through the winding streets, getting off to buy bakor khani and have dinner at Nirob's (we came too early for biryani and stuck to bhortas[31] instead). We got on another rickshah and as we drove towards Hussaini Dalan, Hashim Mama excitedly pointed out his nani's home where he spent a lot of his childhood. "I used to come and stay here a lot when I was a child. The house was always full and everyone in the area knew each other." He enthusiastically narrated his attachment to his grandmother and how special it was to be in Puran Dhaka as a child.

Fig. 2 Teacher Student Centre (TSC), Dhaka University, Ramna (Google Street View 2022).

I usually spent time with Hashim Mama either at his home with his wife, Zara Mami, or with Saif Mama, my maternal uncle. As many of our conversations revolved around Dhaka

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[30] Neighbourhoods of Dhaka South.

[31] Cooked, spiced vegetables or fish, mashed and usually served cold.

and Hashim Mama's passion for city life, we would sometimes venture outside of the tri-state zone (Banani, Gulshan, Baridhara), but never further north, to Nikunja, Uttara, Bashundhara, but always south. It was not only the space of his childhood but a place of different kinds of leisure and public being that were not common to the spaces of the tri-state area, which drew us in this direction. Similar to the way Maqsood (2017) speaks of the nostalgia of the old middle-class of Lahore for the cultural life of earlier decades, I similarly read into Hashim Mama and Saif Mama's stories, with which I began this chapter, a class-based nostalgia manifested in the city spaces they knew and grew up in.

Dhaka South is differently structured than Dhaka North. It is home to Puran Dhaka, literally 'Old Dhaka', originally built along the Buriganga river and made up of multiple neighbourhoods from different historical periods. Though it is also developing and additional planned sections have been added to it over the centuries, it maintains much of its original character and structural logic (Mowla 2011; Ferdous 2016). Many of my interlocutors, like Hashim Mama or Zara Mami, had relatives and partially grew up in Puran Dhaka, as my mother had too. Yet their main homes were situated in Dhanmondi and Farmgate, and later in Gulshan. Their families' movements further north in the city over the last half-century reflects the general development of the city towards the north and the movements of many of the upper-class and upwardly mobile middle-class (Khatun 2013). While Zara Mami and Hashim Mama, and Yasmin (my mother), spent parts of their childhood in Puran Dhaka and slowly moved out in a northerly direction according to wider population and class shifts in Dhaka, this does not mean that there is a clear hierarchy of space: many middle and upper middle-class people choose to remain or move to developing central and southern parts of the city, while others, like Hashim Mama, Saif Mama and Zara Mami came back to it in different ways.

Fig. 3 Street view of Nazimuddin Road, Puran Dhaka (Google Street View 2022).

Puran Dhaka is residential and commercial, but with a very particular character renowned across Dhaka. Naveed and Zonera, another uncle and aunt whom I lived with in my first months in Dhaka, empathically told me: "The people in Puran Dhaka are very different to people here (in northern Dhaka). They speak differently, they're much less formal and nicer." Though they both loved the area, they rarely visited it due to the distance and heavy traffic from their home in Baridhara, to the north of the city. Zonera had not grown up in Puran Dhaka, but her grandparents and parents had their familial homes there. Like other upwardly mobile middle-class people, their families moved further north for better amenities and more spacious living quarters. Zonera and Naveed's affection for Puran Dhaka very much relates to the difference in lifestyle, pace and spatial layout of Old Dhaka compared to Dhaka North where they live. But it also speaks to a kind of emotional nostalgia for a different kind of Dhaka enshrined in the historical centre of Puran Dhaka.

The area is home to the main archaeological and historic sites of the city, including Lalbagh Fort (a Mughal fortress), Ahsan Manzil (the home of the Nawab of Dhaka), Tara Masjid (the star mosque), Hussaini Dalan (the house of the Shia Imam, now a congregation hall and space of prayer for the Shia community), and the Armenian Church. The area is largely made up of narrow winding roads, best accessible by foot and rickshaw. It is famous for its restaurants, particularly the *biryani* (a South Asian dish with *polau* rice, certain kinds of meat, different spices according to the region, and sometimes potatoes) as well as *bakor khani* with *cha* (a dry, flaky bread baked in ovens in the ground, usually eaten with hot tea) served here. When I lived with Zonera and Naveed, we would sometimes venture here to pick up some *biryani* for our Friday dinner and *bakor khani* for afternoon tea and snacks. The *iftari bajars*

and *sehri* platters found here during Ramadan are also famous and very popular among all Muslim people in Dhaka. Apart from food, the businesses of Puran Dhaka are rather wholesale, small-scale, artisanal or retail oriented. Hence, many cheaper markets can be found in the area for all kinds of products, from clothes to electrical parts to glassware.

Different structural logics ranging from different historical periods can be found within Puran Dhaka and its environs, which mark it as different from all other parts of town. This form of local space-making, Mowla (2011) argues, brings together a multitude of people of all religious groups, ethnicities and classes and brings together a "spatiality of layers" (ibid.: 3). Moreover, the axes along which urban spaces are oriented are not fixed, but shift, as do streets, and "the result is a great deal of informality" (ibid.). This layered approach to class and space lends itself well to thinking about all of Dhaka, including the northern tri-state neighbourhoods which, nevertheless, try to separate the different classes spatially, as I discuss further below.

Fig. 4 Rabindra Sharobar, Dhanmondi Lake Park (Google Street View 2022).

With the continued expansion towards the north, Puran Dhaka is now very much segregated from the rest of the city (Nilufar 2001: 6). After Partition in 1947, when current Bangladesh was East Pakistan, the city began its post-British expansion further north. Motijheel and Gulistan formed the economic centre, and though this has shifted, it is still the informal centre of the city for many in Dhaka (Nilufar 2001: 5). Ramna and Shahbagh house two of the most prestigious universities in the country, Dhaka University, the alma mater of

Hashim Mama and Zonera, and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, where Zara Mami studied. They are the hub for much of middle-class political and cultural life in the city. Next to the two universities, their halls and unions are parks, libraries, book shops, the old race course, museums, a few bars, the Intercontinental and Hotel Shahbagh (both historical sites related to the Liberation War), Bangla Academy, as well as a host of street food stalls and tongs, as well as yearly festivals such as Dhaka Lit Fest or *Boi Mela* (book fair in remembrance of the martyrs of the language movement of 1952).

Fig. 5 Chhayanaut on Satmasjid Road in Dhanmondi (Google Street View 2022).

In terms of the upper-class and upwardly mobile middle-class, these shifted to various developed neighbourhoods, such as Wari, Shegun Bagicha, Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur, Farmgate, New and Old Eskaton, which were being built up from 1947 onwards (Khatun 2013). Shegun Bagicha is home to the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (of Fine and Dramatic Arts); Dhanmondi houses Chhayanaut (a prestigious classical performing arts school and centre), at the time also Drik Gallery and Pathshala South Asian Media Institute (both renowned institutions for exhibiting and studying photography and media), libraries, art galleries, cafes and shopping malls; Mohammadpur is partly composed of upmarket housing, art galleries, book shops, St. Joseph's (a prominent boy's secondary school), but also of refugee colonies turned slums, built by waves of migrants from Bihar as well as West Bengal (cf. 1998); Farmgate is now a busy transport intersection hub, but used to be a site of modern housing

developments and tree-lined roads in the 70s and 80s, and is also still home to Holy Cross College, which my mother and *khalas* attended, one of the most prominent sixth-form schools for girls in Dhaka; Old and New Eskaton surround Baily Road, lined with local theatres as well as modern *sharee* shops, and one of the first hubs for cafes and restaurants. Despite heavy traffic, rickshaws can move easily between these areas due to the lack of police check posts and neighbourhood gates, which mark much of Dhaka's northern neighbourhoods. Though many of the chain shops and restaurants as well as property development companies are the same in the southern parts as they are in Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara and Bashundhara, public life operates very differently. And it feels different.
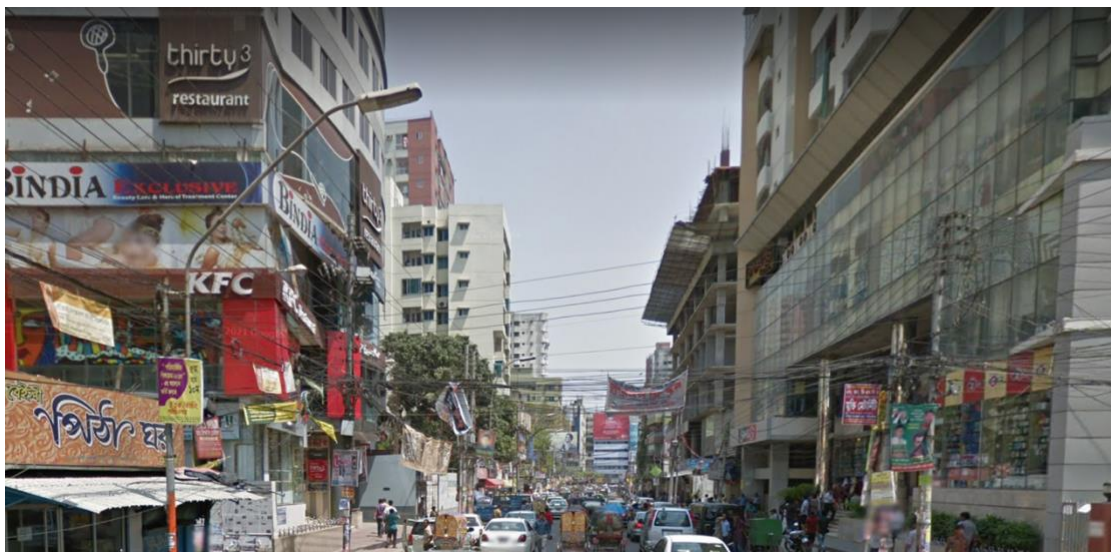
Fig. 6 Bailey Road, Dhaka (Google Street View 2022).

The neighbourhoods of Dhaka South are historically important and are testament to the spatialisation of class. While the upwardly mobile middle-class moved out towards Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara in the second part of the twentieth century, now housing predominantly what I term the upper middle-class, the neighbourhoods of Dhaka South are much more varied in their class inhabitants. But they also carry significance in the personal narratives of people like Hashim Mama and Zara Mami. They spoke of it with some distance, as a place of their past or with longing, which is both viscerally and physically felt. This nostalgia is very much related to class mobility as it is spatially felt across Dhaka. By thinking of this nostalgia as class-based and spatially manifested, there is a potential for understanding this way of remembering the city as productive rather than merely a means to aggrandise the past (Smith & Campbell 2017). Understanding my interlocutors' relations to Dhaka North, the neighbourhoods where most of them lived, sheds further light on how their nostalgia is class-

based and spatially manifested, while also speaking to a means of thinking about, living in and creating Dhaka differently in the future.

Uttar Dhakar Para: **Nostalgia for the Future**

Compared to the areas of Dhaka South and especially Puran Dhaka, the areas of northern (*uttar*) Dhaka I describe here were spoken of with much more derision and mockery. Smoking on a balcony of Rani and Opu's house in the tidy army cantonment area of Baridhara DOHS (Defence Officers' Housing Scheme), Sarwar, a good friend from Puran Dhaka said, "These streets are way too neat." Speaking of Gulshan, Zonera mocked: "No bookshop survives here," implying that 'good' cultural and educational consumption are not available here as they are in areas like Dhanmondi, Ramna or Baily Road in Dhaka South. This perception of Gulshan specifically is very much tied to the spatial layout of the area and the aesthetics its various municipal politicians, planners, business people, societies and committees have espoused for the area.

Fig. 7 Baridhara DOHS Lake Park, Dhaka (Google Street View 2022).

Baridhara DOHS is situated in the North-West of Gulshan 2; it is a cheaper living option compared to Gulshan while being equally, if not more, safe due to the presence of the military. It borders Baridhara, a highly gated, affluent, residential housing neighbourhood, home also to numerous upmarket hotels and embassies; as well as Bashundhara, a new residential and demographically young neighbourhood. In between these more upper middle and upper-class neighbourhoods are areas like Kalachandpur or Joar Shahar, residential areas with cheaper

housing options for working-class and 'lower' middle-class families. My friends, family and interlocutors all lived in upper middle-class neighbourhoods and housing. While I moved through areas like Kalachandpur frequently, I never had much cause to linger there. These areas are also cushioned by slum dwellings, where many of the staff that work in middle and upper middle-class areas live. Korail, a *bosti* (slum) between Gulshan, Banani and Mohakhali, is home to many of the workers who worked at my relatives' and interlocutors' houses.

Fig. 8 New development in Korail (Huq 2022).   Fig. 9 View of Korail from a rooftop in Gulshan 2 (Rahman 2022).

Though a slum, on whose inhabitants much of the surrounding areas depend on for manual and household labour, the land on which it is built is gaining in value. Hence many people are being driven out of Korail, along with shops and local vendors. Figure 1 shows a new developed building in the area. While on the one hand it speaks of urban development, it is not serving the poor and working-class who are not given the space and amenities to live, despite the dependence people of other classes have on them.

Though by no means comparable, the situation in Korail mirrors the question implicit in many of my interlocutors' perceptions of Gulshan, Banani and the surrounding areas as serving a particular kind of aesthetic and image rather than the needs of the city's inhabitants. Many of my interlocutors experience the affluent parts of northern Dhaka as 'inauthentic'. The word "imitative" (Akhter 2017: 151) with regard to current modern architecture in Dhaka's affluent areas similarly doubts the authenticity of that space – it is neither original nor of the place, and ultimately steeped in neo-colonial elite aesthetics based on global design trends. The aesthetics of upper middle and upper-class safety, gated communities, "fortified privatopias"

(Prakash 2011: 1) and "luxotopias" (Kuldova & Varghese 2017) are pronounced in all upper middle and upper-class neighbourhoods, but even more so in Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara DOHS and Baridhara.

As I described at the beginning of this chapter, Hashim and Saif Mama, both friends since their student days at Dhaka University in the 1990s, were sceptical of the affluent places where they lived and raised their children in northern Dhaka. To them, these spaces are not "real" Dhaka; they did not grow up here and though their children attend some of the city's best English-speaking schools, they felt their cultural education was lacking because of the spaces they inhabit.

Also living in the tri-state area (Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara) was Saqib, a middle aged upper middle-class man, who had grown up in India and was a good friend of my cousin. Our conversations often meandered around the question why I like Dhaka. I told him once that I do not think it is trying to pretend to be anything else than what it is. He raised his eyebrows and retorted, "You think Gulshan isn't pretentious?" Saqib often commented on the character of the areas she herself occupied. Much like Hashim and Saif Mama, he doubted the integrity of these spaces, while at the same time being settled and ensconced in the lifestyle this part of the city afforded. Saqib, Hashim and Saif Mama's accounts elucidate how inhabitants of these spaces are themselves at unease with them and how they each must navigate these feelings and relations everyday.
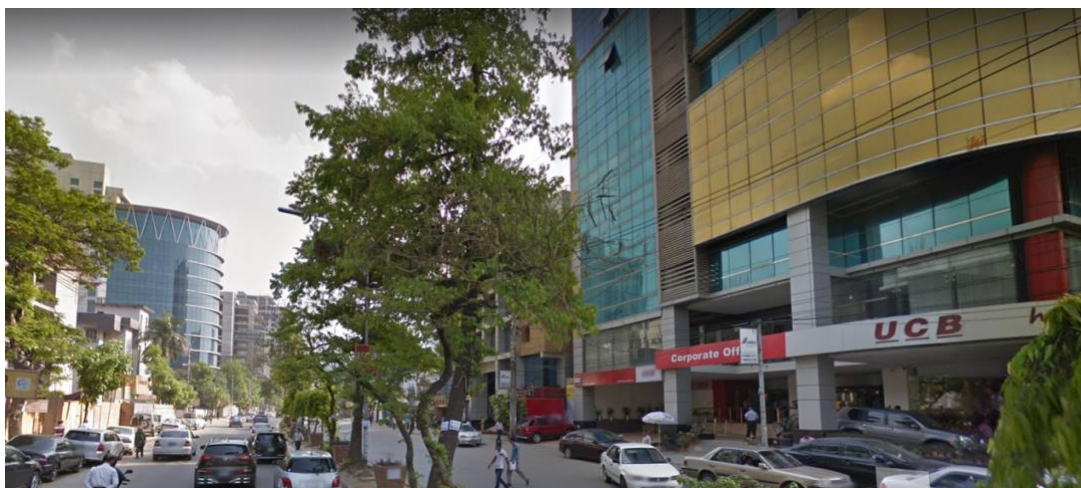
Fig. 10 Gulshan Avenue, Gulshan 2, Dhaka (Google Street View 2013).

Fig. 11 Entrance to Gulshan Central Masjid, Gulshan 2, Dhaka (Google Street View 2013).

On the one hand this speaks to an unease with the way the city has developed and continues to evolve. Dhaka's spaces thus do not uniformly reflect class interests, tastes and lifestyles. Rather, they indicate uncertainty and complexity in the construction of class tastes and space, and the varying senses of what a good Dhaka and good Dhaka neighbourhood should be. This is juxtaposed starkly to the kind of emotional nostalgia for the older parts of Dhaka that Hashim Mama and Saif Mama spoke of. Rather than see this as romanticisation of the past, I see this nostalgia as very much situated within and related to Saqib's or Sarwar's critiques of northern Dhaka. Their understandings of areas like Gulshan or Baridhara DOHS, and their nostalgia or preference for areas in Dhaka South, express an orientation towards the future, rather than the past, in that they reflect a sense not only of what the city was, but what it should and should not become (cf. Campbell, Smith & Wetherell 2017; Smith & Campbell 2017).

Fig. 12 Apartment blocks in Baridhara, Dhaka (Google Street View 2013).

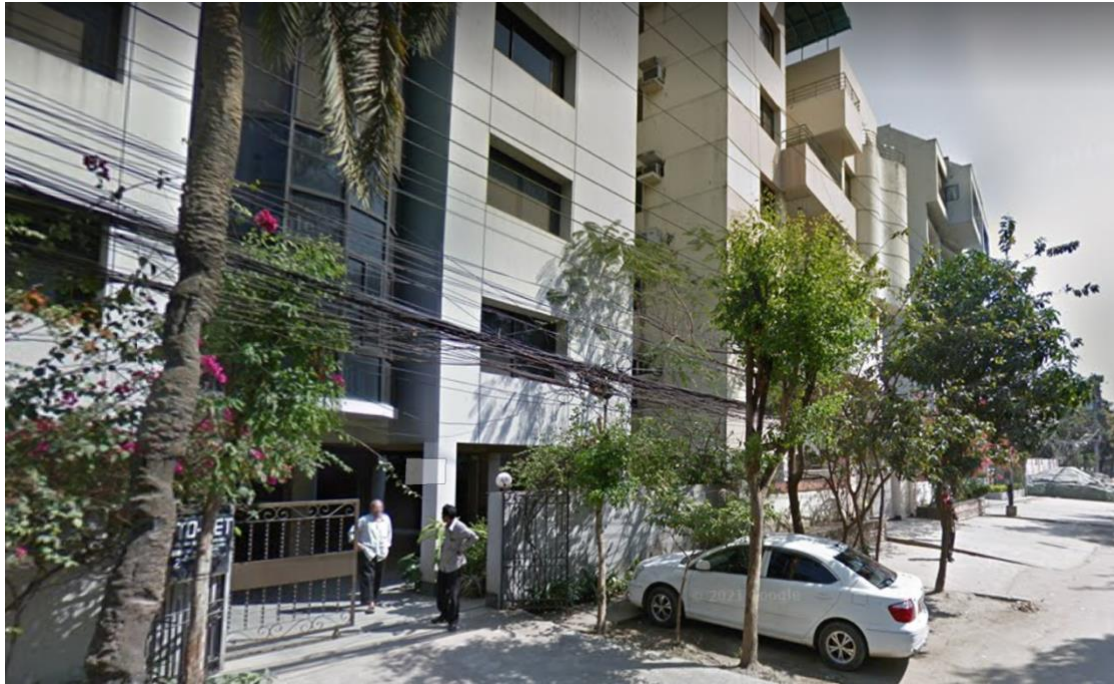This becomes starkly clear when considering the nostalgia for the original, extended family houses in Gulshan. In the mid twentieth century, Gulshan, to the North-East side of Dhaka, was becoming a planned suburb of mansions and single-family homes with gardens. The area became home to diplomatic institutions and their employees, and now also to various international and local non-governmental organisations, businesses, banks and start-ups. While upper middle-class people live in these areas today, middle-class people often work in the offices here and go to the many cafes and restaurants in the area for leisure. My mother still speaks about Gulshan in the way she experienced it as an adolescent - neat streets lined with shiny new upper middle and upper-class family homes. With the exponential growth of land-prices, most single-family houses have now been pulled down and redeveloped into apartment blocks. Many of my interlocutors who had single houses in Gulshan sold them to property developers and now live in new apartments instead. Again, there is much nostalgia for old houses like this. Driving with Opu in a *rickshah* one afternoon, I pointed out the two-storey family house that my nieces lived in, one of the only ones left in the area. "Rani loves these houses," he said, "They're dying out." Nostalgia for the material past of Gulshan is thus equally alive. So while Gulshan itself is subject to major criticism for its gated, exclusive aesthetics and lack of 'authenticity', its spaces and buildings also carry the weight of the city's history and the developments of class mobility and tastes within it.

Fig. 13 One of the few single-family homes left in Gulshan (Google Street View 2013).

Fig. 14 Jatra Biroti, Lucknow restaurant and Aranya in Banani (Google Street View 2013).

In the latter half of 2018, I lived with my *khala* and *khalu* in Gulshan in a five-bedroom apartment in an older apartment block, though it probably stood on the grounds of a former family house. The apartment was larger than the average middle-class three-bed, and it also housed their live-in workers. Those staff who lived outside lived in the nearby Korail *bosti* (slum). The layers of class and religious identities that are most spatially felt in Old Dhaka still exist in Gulshan and other areas of new Dhaka, but the heterogeneity is being subsumed by a certain urban aesthetic of gated affluence, common across South Asia's urban centres (see Srivastava 2009; Akhter 2017; Kuldova & Varghese 2017). But despite its reputation, Gulshan is also considered the place to go for young people who can afford it, with its various shopping malls, bars, parks and restaurants.

The areas I describe here are not exhaustive and do not represent all of middle, upper middle and upper-class Dhaka. But the histories of these areas reveal the story of class development in Dhaka over the last 70 years. Specifically, they reveal how class is spatialised within the contours of the city. The spaces and class populations of Dhaka are also very clearly not homogenous. But the juxtaposition between Dhaka North and Dhaka South, as I have conceived of it here, demonstrates both senses of class aspiration through the development of the city space, while also accompanied by a sense of loss or lack of something close and 'authentic' to the city as my interlocutors have known it throughout their lives. Moreover, my interlocutors' nostalgic responses to the spaces of Dhaka are revealing of how the city is felt, how they imagine its past, but also what kind of space they want in the future. I do not mean

this necessarily in the sense that my interlocutors know exactly what kinds of public spaces, roads, amenities or parks they desire. Rather, they are expressing a certain dissatisfaction and unease with how the city is developing. This in turn speaks to a potential unease with how class is developing in Dhaka, a point I explore further below.

Defining Middle and Upper Middle-Class in Dhaka

The spaces of Dhaka, how they are designed to be used, and how people live in and feel about them, is indicative of class distinctions through use of space, but also how space creates certain classes, subjectivities and modes of living. As I described in the beginning of this chapter, Saif Mama and Hashim Mama's sense that their children were not getting the kind of life and education that they had and would like for them, due to the spaces that they are growing up in, speaks of this condition. What is less clear is the distinction between middle and upper middle-classes, as many of the spaces I speak about are shared by both. My interlocutors have roots in the middle-class, but I would now describe them as upper middle-class. For the sake of clarity, I here focus on describing the middle and upper middle-classes separately, while still trying to do justice to their heterogeneity and the ways in which they overlap.

When discussing class while I was in Dhaka, I often used the term elite but this mostly met with consternation. Eliteness is not something people feel can be a constant – it requires constant performance and sometimes even that is not enough to sustain it. I started asking people how they would define upper middle-class. A young acquaintance, a friend of a friend, mentioned that having a car for one's leisure – rather than as a means of income – was a marker of being upper middle-class. On the other hand, many of my interlocutors who owned cars (for their leisure and safety) would not consider themselves this way. Indeed, having a car is a point of aspiration for many middle-class people: not just due to the lack of functioning and safe transport but also due to the social meanings it implies (Morshed in Afzal 2017). It is thus not thought of as something exclusive to the upper middle-class. But it does imply variation in lifestyles and aspirations among these classes.

Speaking to Hashim Mama, he understood what my acquaintance meant by this definition of upper-class. His own family owned a car, along with an apartment building and an undeveloped plot of land in one of the most expensive parts of town, in addition to sending their children to expensive private schools. But he still would not consider himself upper middle-class (by virtue, for instance, of his children still depending on scholarships to study abroad). When trying to understand the upper-class, Maheen, a good friend and researcher in the arts, whose work has led her to work across social spheres in Bangladesh, thought of upper-

class as referring to descendants of old Nawabi families. I told Hashim Mama that I was not entirely convinced by this, but he argued, "I understand what she means. Think about it, even with middle-class people. Our families all came from villages. But do you think my family or your family were poor farmers?"

Rafik – a young middle-class professional working in the private sector - on the other hand, told me, "I'm not so sure about this idea of upper middle-class. The different classes are already divided, why should we start talking about one class like this?" He did not see the necessity for such divisions among the middle-class and resented the stratification it implied. Navigating all these different understandings of class was difficult, and I have struggled to find a clear definition of either the middle and upper middle-class, particularly as many of my interlocutors, like Zonera, appeared to be on the cusp of the two, while hailing from solidly middle-class backgrounds. What was clear amongst all of them was that there is a certain unease when it comes to class and specifically about defining oneself as upper middle-class when that was not the reality of their childhood and upbringing. Essentially, I differentiate between the classes my interlocutors inhabit according to how they have benefitted from the economic development of the country and class mobility, and to what extent mobility was not necessary for their families' survival to begin with.

As I have outlined above, I similarly do not simply look at class as economic fact, but consider it in terms of tastes, skills, (strategies of) distinction and experience also (cf. Bourdieu 1979), with a particular focus on space and spatial habits. But the way class relations and existences have developed over the decades since Bangladesh's independence are intimately tied to the mobilities and inter-city migration many of my interlocutors have experienced (cf. Khatun 2013), and the way they feel about these experiences now.

The electoral foundation of the Awami League, the currently ruling party in Bangladesh and the party which politically mobilised the fight for independence from West Pakistan, culminating in the bloody Liberation War in 1971, was largely the local Bangali middle-class (Mannan 1990; Kabeer 1991). The right to self-determination and to freedom of cultural and religious expression, which partially underpinned the grievances and endeavours for independence, is largely read as embedded in the experiences of the middle-class (Kabeer 1991: 5). This accompanied the economic dominance of West Pakistan over East Pakistan between 1947 and 1971. Alavi (1972) explains this development as an inevitable outcome of a system of three propertied and five non-propertied classes, coupled with a West Pakistani military-bureaucratic oligarchy who formed the ruling class and who had their own interests. Alavi (ibid.) and Mannan (1990) discuss how the military-bureaucratic oligarchy of the time

led to the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a very few West Pakistani families. Coupled with the economic exploitation of resources from East Pakistan, with little flowing back into regional development, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a regionally specific class further exacerbated the already unequal power dynamics between the two regions. For the middle-class, this also meant little opportunity for upward mobility.

In the context of post-independence (after 1971), Bangladesh's class formations again began to change. Scholars note that in the initial years of independence, non-Bangalis and migrants from other parts of India particularly filled the gap of the bourgeoisie, due to the limited capital and opportunities that were available to the local middle-class following decades of exploitation, a war and the development of a new state administration (Ummar 1960, 2004; Mannan 1990; Mondal 2014: 357). This was overturned with increasing nationalisation projects and the onset of a new military-bureaucratic oligarchy, starting with the military coup of 1975 (Mannan 1990; Mondal 2014: 356). Following fifteen years of military dictatorship, democracy was restored in 1991. With it came a drastic number of changes, characterised by market-driven neoliberal policies and practices, and the consequent formation of new social groups and class mobilities (Mannan 1990: 389; Mondal 2014: 361). These include owners in the booming ready-made garments industry, real estate business people, private university owners, managers in the development sector, business people in the pharmaceutical industry, as well as remittance earners (ibid.). It is these business elite and employees in the private sector that ostensibly formed a new kind of middle-class, who hold substantial economic clout today.

The growth of Bangladesh's middle-class over the last thirty years has been widely documented. With a middle-class population of 20% in 2010, an increase by 10.1% since 1992 (Khan 2019), Bangladesh is considered to be developing rather rapidly, though fears of remaining in the middle income trap are widespread (Rahman & Bari 2016). Of the middle-class population, 48% are employed in the private sector, while 20% are employed in the public sector. The lives of my interlocutors here document the changes and variability in middle-class lifestyles, as well as upward mobility into the upper middle-class for some. The relatively recent expansion of the middle-classes necessitates that a wide variation in lifestyles and tastes prevail among these classes (Mujeri 2019). Members of a more established middle-class, such as Hashim Mama, experience upward mobility in certain ways, for example, through renting out inherited land or apartments in now expensive neighbourhoods. Many would consider his family upper-class at this point, not due to their heritage, but through their property and rapid mobility. Though Hashim Mama might simultaneously find himself facing similar problems,

such as unemployment, in the same way as more recent members of the middle-class, the effects are far less dire for him.

Maqsood's (2017) approach to class is holistic in that she considers the relationality of class, religiosity, nostalgia, space and family histories. While here I do not describe a new middle-class in Dhaka, her historiography has been inspiring to me in many ways, and it speaks to the wider conditions of class formation in South Asia, including Dhaka. Maqsood posits the development of a new middle-class, mainly in Lahore, which is marked by individuals and families becoming socially mobile in the mid to late twentieth century through successful businesses. Following Partition in 1947, the local, Western-educated civil servants of the British administration took over as administrators and officials in the following governments of the newly born nations of South Asia (Barlas 1995; Maqsood 2017). These made up the middle-class of this time, which Maqsood refers to as the old middle-class. Over the following decades, a new middle-class was able to develop in the city which was not dependent on government positions, but which has been successful through private business ventures. Of course, divisions within this class are also present through the potential for upward mobility: some are unable to 'progress' beyond a certain point, whereas others are less inhibited by structural barriers. Moreover, some have more stability in the sense that their sources of income are more defused, whereas others rely on a sole earner – the loss of whom can be devastating and plunge a family into insecurity. In addition, the new lifestyles and approaches to religion and public cultural life brought about through the new middle-class in Lahore, has created a nostalgia for a 'traditional' urban cultural life among members of the old middle-class.

The class formations, which Maqsood (2017, regarding urban Pakistan) and Fernandes (2006, in relation to India) describe, developed in similar ways across South Asia and are reflected in present day Bangladesh. Government jobs, for example, are still greatly coveted by middle-class university students and graduates in Bangladesh today. This can be read both as a continued aspiration towards middle-class distinctions, as well as for the need for security and self-preservation, very much a characteristic of the middle-class (cf. Khan 2019; Mujeri 2019). Distinction also works in plural ways among these classes. While for some speaking English and being educated in English is considered not only a pragmatic asset but a distinguishing quality, for others a proper Bangla education, being able to read a range of Bangla literature fluently, including that of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and speak without using English phrases is considered distinguished by many middle-class people. On the other hand, a predominantly English education, speaking English at home and studies

abroad in the UK, US and Australia in particular are today considered markers of the upper middle-class.

Moreover, household staff, including cooks, maids, handymen, guards and, particularly, drivers are prevalent in upper middle-class homes. Middle-class people will also keep staff, but often these workers do not live with the family and are moving from house to house, working for multiple offices and homes at once. But this distinction is more general, as nowadays many younger upper middle-class people, particularly women on whom this labour falls, do not necessarily want to have staff around, as they prefer their privacy and do not mind doing household chores. Rani and Zonera were both not interested in keeping staff in their homes and did not mind doing these tasks themselves. Working-class women make up a large part of this workforce. However, due to greater work opportunities in factories and as part time labourers, and the insecurity and often abuse they would face from middle, upper middle and upper-class employers, it is becoming increasingly hard to find female staff in Dhaka.

Much like Maqsood (2017), I am weary of essentialising my interlocutors and the social groups they are a part of. Thinking about different social groups through their different experiences of urban life is Maqsood's means of exploring what class feels like in contemporary Lahore. This approach sees individual histories, education, economic income and in/stability, religiosity and urbanity as intricately interwoven. Following the various ways in which Hashim Mama, Saif Mama, Maheen and Rafik speak of class in Dhaka today, I similarly think of religious, urban and middle to upper middle-class experiences in immersive, interactional terms rather than as calcified wholes. I now turn to specific spaces in Dhaka to show how thinking about space offers the tools to grasp contemporary experiences of class as interlinked with religious-secular experiences.

Class, Security and Religious-Secular Experience in Public Space

Class boundaries in Dhaka are inscribed through things like taste, language and education, but also through aesthetic and spatial practices in the city space. As areas like Baridhara DOHS and the police check posts around northern Dhaka show, the aesthetics of privilege and the delineation of space in Dhaka according to class boundaries are bound to ideas around and desire for 'security'. The way security is used to organise space in Dhaka shows how religious-secular spaces are simultaneously governed and adapted by the same principles. While on the outside religious and secular spaces can and will be judged as separate by my interlocutors, looking at security sheds light on how the middle and upper middle-class relate to needs for safety rather than exclusively religious or secular space.

One summer afternoon in June, I met Isa at the upmarket Chef's Table food court in Gulshan 2. It was hot outside and we needed a place to kill time, and Chef's Table was an easy place to lounge and avoid the heat. This, of course, is only possible as long as one meets certain aesthetic criteria of privilege that allow one access to the space of this food court and the right to linger. Dress, for instance, is an important part of this. While the guards outside the building may not bar people from entering, working-class people will exclude themselves from these spaces due to hierarchical class relations and aesthetic exclusions. Set above the expensive supermarket Unimart, which sells foreign and upmarket goods, the food court is similarly comprised of a range of upscale local restaurant chains and outlets. The space was quite new in 2019 and so we were discussing how we felt about it.

Isa was not living in Dhaka at the time but was visiting as part of his own research and for work. He pointed around us when the *ajaan* (call to prayer) sounded: "Look at how religion is organised in here. Like the *ajaan* is only in here, like it's somehow exclusive to the space." The *ajaan* was coming from within the building, calling people to pray in the designated prayer spaces, signposted with mosque symbols on the walls. The building is in central Gulshan 2 and other mosques are in close proximity and their call to prayers are also audible. Neither Isa nor I made use of the prayer spaces there, though other relatives and friends would do so. Isa felt that this had a lot to do with upper middle and upper-class ideas of security, particularly post-Holey, when in 2016, the upmarket Holey bakery was occupied by men defined as Islamist, killing both foreign and local café visitors, a deeply troubling event for upper middle and upper-class people in the area (cf. Burke 2016).

Often security, however, is more ambiguous and symbolic: most malls, shops, restaurants and mosques in these northern neighbourhoods have security guards and scanners, though these are often not turned on and malfunctioning, while the guards pay little attention beyond asking where one is headed. The police that control the entry and exit to these neighbourhoods and who patrol the streets are similarly more concerned with receiving bribes and confiscating "contraband" – usually of the leisure sort: alcohol, *ganja* and, in Isa's case, tobacco. The affluent neighbourhoods of northern Dhaka are more committed to these demonstrations of security as many foreigners and embassies are in these locations, the state and businesses here thus have a greater need to invest in such shows of security. At the same time, they highlight a commitment to protecting not just wealth but the control and privatisation of space. The privatisation of space has extended from private homes into the public sphere, to create 'secure' and class-stratified enclaves (Akhter 2017). This is very much a common feature of contemporary affluent neighbourhoods in Dhaka. Isa's comment about the call to

prayer only sounding within the walls of the Unimart building referred to the very private nature of an otherwise very public and communal call, highlighting the exclusivity and privatised nature of the space.

Some mosques in these northern areas have started to take up similar spatial ethics characterised by (class specific) security. The Gulshan Society Jame Masjid, situated in the affluent Gulshan 2 district, for example, is an enormous white stone and glass monolith rising up to six floors. It is encased in a low wall and kept locked outside of prayer times, with guards standing watch outside, as they do in front of all apartment blocks in the area. It was commissioned by the Gulshan Society, an association of affluent residents of the Gulshan area. It occupies an entire block and is situated opposite the guarded Gulshan Lake Park – where the attire of visitors and their direction of walking are controlled – as well as among various upmarket residential apartment blocks, clubs and mansions. Most mosques in Bangladesh are not kept under guard in the same way.

The aesthetics of the mosque space reflect the aesthetics and aspirations of the wider Gulshan area, though not unanimously of its inhabitants. The security features further highlight the insecurities of this class and neighbourhood. The Holey Bakery attack in 2016, which Isa referred to, is significant in that it happened for (ostensibly) religious reasons, in an upmarket area and establishment, the people affected were both foreign and local, and, most significantly, the perpetrators were solidly middle-class. The background of the perpetrators was often commented on at events I attended, as it laid bare that the middle and upper-classes were not exempt from the 'problem' of 'Islamic radicalism'. Many of the security features, including around mosques in the city, became more stringent following Holey. More than simply fearing the intrusion of external forces into the lives of people who frequented spaces like the Gulshan Society Jame Masjid, I see these developments as a reflection of the shift in self-perception of the classes and communities inhabiting these neighbourhoods. It further appears to exacerbate the rate of privatisation and gatekeeping of communities (and thus also wealth) in Dhaka, a feature of many cities today, particularly in the Global South (cf. Prakash 2011).

This development of class enclaves is inscribed in the history of Dhaka as a former colony of Western empires. The colonial presence did much to create enclaves in Dhaka, with areas like Paltan in southern Dhaka (north of Puran Dhaka) being reserved first for the British army, and then for the gentile classes who could afford it (Nilufar 2001; Khatun 2013). The government housing complexes across the city, reserved for officials working in government offices, as well as housing complexes for university staff, were precursors to the kind of private enclaves and gated communities that have become quite standard across middle, upper middle

and upper-class neighbourhoods. Samia Khala, one of my interlocutors whom I met through a gathering organised by relatives, spent some of her time growing up in such a government complex, as both her father was a chief engineer and her maternal grandparents were working for the government around the 1960s and 1970s. Speaking to me in English, she described the area as follows:

> At Baily Road the residences were usually occupied by government officials who lived in designated localities, according to their status. These were planned communities that housed schools, colleges, parks, clubs, reception halls, hotels and other amenities appropriate for living a comfortable city life. It was easy to grow up with like-minded people (their status being very similar) even though they were from various districts across East Pakistan. Our lives were quite disciplined: we would go to school in the morning, return in the afternoon; go to play at the grounds in the late afternoon; and return at sunset. All family members going to school or colleges or even universities, would study in the evening and have dinner and go to sleep as per individual preference. My schooling was done at Viquarunnissa. This was one of the best schools for girls in those days. All the students had to be officers' children from the surrounding areas.

Samia Khala's description is indicative of the kind of life that was envisioned as good and fruitful for the (upwardly mobile) middle-class at the time. The clean, ordered space aesthetically and practically enforced the trajectory and mobility of people inhabiting these environs. At the same time, these spaces were made to allow the inhabiting class to distinguish itself materially and habitually from the rest of the city and people of other classes and backgrounds. The way Samia Khala describes the separation of religious communities further highlights the habitual separation of communities across class and religious distinctions: "People lived by moral principles and did not disturb each other, although there was private mistrust among the various communities." Her description gives a sense of simultaneous togetherness and separation of various communities and families in middle-class enclaves. The idea of mistrust, which Samia Khala speaks of, is, in my reading, reflected in the very structures of middle and upper middle-class urban space. Adding to Bourdieu's (1979) ideas on class distinction, mistrust and (in)security are fundamental to the experience of urban middle and upper middle-class space and class subjectivities. In this reading, social capital translates into the affordance of 'safety', which is here very broadly and contextually construed. The

contemporary spaces of Gulshan, Baridhara, Baridhara DOHS, Mohakhali DOHS, Banani DOHS and Bashundhara, are extreme manifestations of this need for distinction and security.

Security in the way that Samia Khala described it, in spatial terms, implies security from other classes and religious communities. It also implies security for middle, upper middle and upper-class women, which is secured through amenities like travelling in private cars, allowing them to move around the city, including at night. Security is, in this sense, still heavily gendered and also does little to empower women to feel safe in public space (cf. Raju 2011; Akhter 2017).

Though fear of petty criminals is real, I found that my interlocutors were more afraid of certain state police forces, such as the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), people with political power and those business owners with substantial economic clout, which is why many middle and upper middle-class people choose to stay away from politics entirely. In Bashundhara, for example, the Bashundhara Group, a family-owned Bangladeshi conglomerate, built up and now runs the neighbourhood of Bashundhara in North-West Dhaka. The owning family lives in two palaces on the outskirts of the area. The group is known for exerting violence and coercion, a topic that is joked about in dark humour by many residents and workers there, including the local *rickshah* drivers. The figure of the violent, millionaire business owner is known in Dhaka and business rivalries are often treated with utmost care, due to the violence (towards family members also) that can quickly ensue. Hashim Mama was the only one of my interlocutors who was, at the time of our meeting, trying to start a political party of his own, something not uncommon particularly amongst middle and upper middle-class men in Dhaka. Kuldova (2017: 44) describes a continuous fear-mongering that bolsters needs for security and luxotopias (luxury, utopian enclaves reserved for the upper-classes) in urban India. The increasing need for class-based security and safe spaces in Dhaka is tied up both with class needs for distinction and separation from others, but also with an overarching sense of fear regarding religion-based violence as well as the insecurity of political and economic power structures in the country.

The ideas of security that are applied to middle and upper middle-class homes, spaces of leisure, mosque and prayer spaces are similarly applied to spaces designed for bourgeois 'cultural' engagement. These are spaces that would be locally defined as secular-liberal, where ideas, knowledge and creative exchange can occur with as well as without religious interpretations and (ideally) irrespective of the religious community of the audience. In early 2019, I was lying under the fan in my room reading *The Daily Star*, the leading national English language newspaper. I was browsing the arts section and came across an exhibition being held

in Puran Dhaka exploring the wider theme of gender and subjectivation. I could not, however, find an address, just the name of the organiser. I called Maheen, a friend who was active in the realm of the arts in Dhaka and she said that she had been invited by the organisers and asked if I would like to go. So, one afternoon, we took an Uber together to the outskirts of Lalbagh in Old Dhaka, then got off and walked through the narrow winding streets. After having lunch, consisting of different types of fish, *dal* (lentils) and rice, at a local restaurant, we wandered around looking for the exhibition location. After a phone call to the organiser, we went through a low gate and into an apartment building. Walking up to the first floor, a young man in a *lungi* (draped cloth worn by men), who had seemingly just woken up, opened the door. He let us in, switching on the lights in the two rooms and putting on some small video installations, then left us to explore on our own. The gallery was a small two-room apartment, with a narrow kitchen and a bathroom attached. The first room was dedicated to S.M. Sultan, one of Bangladesh's most famous and praised painters of the 20th century. Sultan's most famous works depict rural life in Bangladesh, focusing on farmers and their daily chores. The exhibition, however, shed light on the artist's seemingly fluid gender identity, most vividly depicted in their habit of cross-dressing. The next room was more diverse, featuring a range of works including sculptures, etchings, drawings and small light and video installations, created by both local and international artists. Dividing the two rooms was a window, without glass but with a white *jali* (lattice work) in between. We then stood at this windowpane looking from one room into the other, and had tea with *bakor khani* (a kind of dry, flaky snack special to Old Dhaka), which the young caretaker provided us with. We were the only visitors for the time we were there.

The way the exhibition was advertised, but whose location was simultaneously not disclosed, is reminiscent of Mookerherjee's (2015) sense of a 'public secret', a condition in which an event or occurrence is known and public, but also unanimously not spoken of. Awareness of the exhibition, of what is going on in Dhaka was important, but equally was ensuring its safety. The content of the exhibition was considered perhaps too explicit, and its security and that of its visitors was ensured by not making its location public. Through this, of course, access to the space was limited and only possible through invitation or through the possibility of finding alternative access, as I did, which would not necessarily be possible to all. Open discussion of plurality of gender would to many in Dhaka also be read as only a liberal and secular possibility (cf. Ahmad 2008, 2017; Raqib 2020). Interestingly then, the excluding potential of the notions of security that are currently prevalent in Dhaka hint at how a need for security is being spatially manifested across religious communities, classes and

socio-political boundaries. It also highlights how ostensibly secular-liberal and religious-conservative spaces (cf. Rashiduzzaman 1994), a division in thinking applied by my interlocutors in Dhaka that I unpack in chapter five, are in fact very much embroiled in a similar class-centric logic of spatial segregation of the city.

Iftar and Eid: Connecting Class, Food Security and Public Space

The securitised mosques and other spaces that I have described elucidate how different neighbourhoods are privatising and securing space according to broad middle-class (and upper-class) desires to spatially close off the city and deny its layers. At the same time, people of different classes cross paths, live under the same roof (albeit on very different terms) or even share transport on a daily basis. Here I elaborate on how food, how it is made and where it is consumed, during Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr is a vehicle for both maintaining middle and upper middle-class distinction, while also allowing for mobility across the city and the abrogation of spatialised class boundaries.

I turn to food specifically during the time of Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr as it engages the notion of food security in complex ways. On the one hand, hygiene, food and water security are extremely important and well-researched topics in Dhaka due to the continued insecurity around drinkable and edible water and food, particularly for the city's poor (cf. Keck & Etzold 2013; Mandal et al. 2021). But food security is also very much an issue of middle and upper-class relations to public space, in which food occupies a central role, as I show here. Harb and Deeb's (2013) work on leisure amongst shi'i communities in southern Beirut beautifully expounds on the relationship between religion, leisure and public space. In similar vein to how Harb and Deeb think about the morality of consumption in these spaces, I too think of food security as a local discourse that lays bare middle and upper middle-class relationships to public space and people of other classes.

This is most strongly felt during Ramadan and *Roja Eid*[32], when leisure and religious life become imbricated in profound ways. During Ramadan, rush hour times transform and become more intense close to sunset, with people rushing home from shops and work in order to make it home in time for *iftar*. Going out for *sehri* and *iftar* has become more common. As anywhere, and particularly through the absence of alcohol in (most) public spaces, food and tea – and now coffee – are a fundamental part of social life in the city. For *sehri* and *iftar*, special platters are on offer with foods and fruits particular to the time of year and the occasion.

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[32] *Eid-ul-Fitr*, celebrated after Ramadan. *Roja Eid* means "fasting Eid" in Bangla.

This includes a whole universe of foods which vary according to people's tastes and preferences (and of course what they can afford). Going out for food, however, is a middle-class social habit that has developed since the later decades of the 20ᵗʰ century. Not only is it about affordability, but it was simply not something done among *bhodro* (gentile) families until then. Food was something to be made and consumed at home. This ethos is still partly present today, however, it is now couched in terms of food security. My relatives that I lived with in Gulshan similarly would not bring in food from outside the home, "It's not clean," my *khala* would tell me.

At the same time, many younger people will go out for *iftar* and *sehri* (particularly groups of friends and couples). Zonera, in her early 40s, both enjoyed having iftar and sehri at home, as well as going out to enjoy what the restaurants had on offer. But she felt that Ramadan and Eid had become private, less public and festive. "It's not as fun as when we were kids." She highlighted her father's death and the absence of half of her siblings, who had moved abroad, as reasons for her feelings and experiences of religious festivals today. The absence of the people she associated with religious celebrations most dampened her enthusiasm, but also motivated her to maintain and create a particular experience of these festivities for her and Naveed, her husband. During Ramadan, she habitually cooked a few different *iftari* dishes. She and Naveed mostly ate at home but would venture out to enjoy food outside in 'clean' cafes and restaurants catering to middle and upper middle-class tastes. Like Zonera, most people would stay at home particularly in the first week of *roja*, but this slowly became more lax as the month progressed and people became accustomed to the daily routine of Ramadan.

After the initial week of adjusting, my friends and family (and myself included) tended to go out for dinner or coffee after *iftar* to meet friends and (unmarried) partners. Going out for *iftar* and *sehri* is not uncommon, yet eating at home and bringing food from outside is a fundamental part of middle-class Ramadan in Dhaka as well. For Saif Mama, going to southern Dhaka (or sending their family's driver when he was too busy at work) to pick up certain foods for *iftar* and *sehri* was important. Countless *iftari* stalls and *bajars* open across the city during Ramadan. Apart from street stalls, many malls, clubs and hotels across the well-to-do neighbourhoods of Dhaka open up their own *iftari* fairs. These are found in all neighbourhoods, but vary in the kinds of food they serve, the aesthetics and, of course, pricing. The affluent neighbourhoods of northern Dhaka offer all traditional *iftari* foods, like *piyaju* (friend lentil and onion patties), *beguni* (fried battered eggplant) or *doi bora* (lentil balls in yoghurt), and much more. Many people, like Saif Mama, will insist on getting food from particular parts of town. Puran Dhaka is famous for its *iftari* fairs and people will travel to get food from there at

some point during Ramadan, despite the traffic being even more intense than usual. As explained in chapter two, for Saif Mama, the *jilapis* (a circular shaped sweet made from ghee, flour, saffron and sugar syrup) from the Sonargaon Hotel in central Dhaka (at the south-western tip of Hatirjheel) were the best and were thus a staple on his family's *iftar* table. But getting these on the table for *iftar* is time consuming considering Ramadan traffic and the obligations of family, school and work. Saif Mama would send his driver to pick these up, a trip that could take hours in normal traffic.

Having food from different parts of town for iftar is thus also now a sign of class affordance and mobility. But this is highly dependent on workers, such as Saif Mama's drivers, spending hours in traffic and bringing this food to their employers' homes in time for *iftar*. On the one hand, food travelling across the city during Ramadan connects middle and upper middle-class people, particularly in northern Dhaka, to public spaces and different corners of the city in a way that they often do not have reason to access. But this relationship is also heavily mediated by working-class people who are moving within the interstices of private (middle and upper middle-class) and public spaces.

The consumption and sourcing of food during Ramadan sheds light on how eating out and eating food that is made outside of the home has transformed urban middle and upper middle-class experiences of eating and spending time in public settings, while many also continue to choose not due to security (like my khala) or in order to be close to family during the fasting month. While there is more opportunity now, through clean, attractive cafes and restaurants, to eat and hang out outside the home, there are still clear spatial distinctions between how space can be used as well as who has access to them, a privilege afforded by markers of class. Getting specific food from outside, the way Saif Mama does, is also a marker of class affordance (in terms of money, transport and time) in getting the foods for *iftar* that are important to one's family. But this is also heavily dependent on the time, energy and mobility of working or lower middle-class employees, who often end up having *iftar* at work rather than at home with their families.

While I do not want to do away with the unease my interlocutors feel towards the term upper middle-class, the distinctions and hierarchies within the middle-classes is palpable. What seems important is to understand that the unease my interlocutors' stories suggest comes from the distance between classes that (in recent decades rather rapid) social mobility creates. On the one hand, these differences are desired (people want to do better for themselves and their families and live less precarious lives), in this sense all middle and upper middle-class people rely on and want to employ and have the help of the working and lower middle-classes. But it

also creates differences that are jarring and not necessarily how people (always) view themselves. I began this chapter describing how the neighbourhoods of northern Dhaka are described as spatially distant from the city, creating further divisions between people and classes. The way that classes interact in public and private spaces, and how they differently move across the spaces of Dhaka, like Saif Mama's driver, is indicative of how these divisions of class difference are enacted through space, even when they are simultaneously connecting classes.

Saif Mama's driver[33] moved across the city for his employer's family, in a car that did not belong to him but on which he depended for his livelihood, and Saif Mama's desire was made possible by his driver going to the (not literally, but practically) other side of Dhaka to retrieve food that is meaningful to him. This image encompasses how the lives of different classes intersect and come together, in a relation of mutual dependence, while simultaneously reproducing the differences between them.

Conclusion

What emerges is a sense of Dhaka city as heterogenous in the way that the lives, needs and desires of different classes intersect. Yet while there is overlap, class is clearly spatialised across the city. The middle and upper middle-classes are distinguishable by their family histories, their level of economic security and their access (and comfort within) specific spaces. Broadly speaking, they overlap in their desires for security and access to clean, safe food and spaces of leisure.

I have attempted to show here how my interlocutors are largely of an upper segment of the middle-class, though self-identification as classed subjects remains a point of unease for many like Hashim Mama. The different feelings and sentiments towards the northern and southern neighbourhoods of Dhaka, that I have juxtaposed here, demonstrate how feelings are historically and socially validated, and very much part of generational and class experiences of the city space. This is further strengthened by aesthetic expressions of security that have come to govern how people, of all classes and genders, move in and access the city. Security has become an important tool for demarcating classed spaces, however, it is also very much a manifestation of the fear of political-economic power structures in Dhaka and Bangladesh that upper middle-class and many upper-class people also cannot escape. I finally turned to food

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[33] I do not know if his driver identifies as middle-class, working-class or otherwise. Drivers in Dhaka can earn very well, and a good driver is considered very 'valuable' by upper middle-class people specifically.

security and eating food from outside during Ramadan to show how class relations to food have changed and are emblematic of their relations to public space, though this is an access afforded by the mediation of working and lower middle-class employees.

I laid the ground here for thinking through the feelings of my interlocutors towards the city to explore the material and experiential nature of class. More than simply describing the city, the very classed relations to the city space also reveal class tensions and discourses around the religious-secular becoming of the city as well as the middle and upper middle-class. The plural and intersecting identities of my interlocutors affect how their negotiations and orientations as religious people come about. This becomes clear through a focus on the spaces and materiality of the city, my interlocutors' embodied interactions with these spaces, and the feelings they have towards Dhaka and its spaces.

Chapter 4: Negotiating Religious-Secular Becoming in Dhaka

During the late morning, on a hot May day in the middle of Ramadan, I sat down with Hashim Mama in a quiet bedroom in one of his family's apartments in Gulshan. Mama switched off the fan that was whirring over our heads and put the AC on to make sure we were comfortable. This was our first formal interview, which, though by now he was very much an uncle to me, I was still very nervous about. Hashim Mama spoke to me in Bangla and encouraged me to reciprocate. His affectionate encouragement was also mixed with equally amiable but biting mockery over my timid pronunciation. This, I feel, is as much a reflection of his humour as well as our (fictive) kinship. It was my first Ramadan in Dhaka, and the fourth month of my 'fieldwork'. Though I hadn't been living in Dhaka long, the material and visceral changes to the city compared to times outside of Ramadan were very real to me. We were both fasting, though I was drinking water for health reasons, a form of fasting my friend Isa has termed "Priyanka-roja[34]". Hashim Mama accepted this, placing a small glass of water in front of me before our interview began, which I only sipped on a few times out of respect for his hospitality as well as his fast. While describing the way Islam was practised in his house while growing up in the 1970s, and now with his children there too, Hashim Mama told me that to him religion is culture. "Looking back, all this was actually cultural. Now it is one culture." I asked if he was talking about Ramadan, to which he responded, "No, everything religious is cultural."

Over the course of this (almost three-hour) interview, one of the few I recorded, it became clear to me that for Hashim Mama, conceiving of religion as culture was important. Though in Dhaka ascertaining somebody's religiosity is usually done through enquiring about people's religious practice, as I described in the methodology of this thesis, Hashim Mama felt deeply religious though he did not pray regularly or attend mosque. He did, however, fast fervently during Ramadan. I describe in this chapter how this was not about a secular interiorising of religion or cordoning it off within the private sphere of the body-self. In this image of the secular, religion is not erased but is relocated to the 'private' domain where it can remain on the condition that it does not interfere with matters deemed to be within the purview of so-called

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[34] *Roja* means fasting, hence *roja* Eid refers to the *Eid-ul-Fitr*.

'public' life (cf. Latour 1990; Mahmood 2015).[35] Neither is it adequate to say all of Hashim Mama's religiosity was relegated to the time of Ramadan. Rather, Hashim Mama's religiosity is exteriorised through his very experience of and conscious effort to emphasise religion and culture as being the same. He was not alone in this, as the stories of my interlocutors throughout this chapter show. Though many within his familial and friendship circle disagree with his interpretations, his position, I argue, expresses his way of navigating and negotiating his plural identity in Dhaka.

Hashim Mama's equating of religion and culture is his response to the way Islam and *Bangali* identity have often been construed as in conflict in local academic and activist writings (Roy 1984; Mohsin 2000; Uddin 2006; Rahman 2012). As I noted in the introduction to this thesis, East Pakistani (1947-1971) secularism opposed an instrumentalisation by the West Pakistani state of 'proper' Islam (Nair 2023). This narrative insisted on an 'improper' Islam that was seen to be practiced in Bengal that required state intervention (though this largely veiled a practice of economic exploitation by West Pakistan of an East Pakistan rich in resources). Thus secularism, as espoused by *Bangali* thinkers and politicians like Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Abul Hashim pre-independence, incorporated religious pluralism as well as the right to practise Islam freely as *Bangalis* (Nair 2023). Writers like Mohsin (2000), Uddin (2006) and Rahman (2012) argue that this commitment to secularism waned post-independence (1971), an argument which contemporary civil society organisations and activists in Bangladesh continue to uphold (Mookherjee 2015).

The secular question is intimately tied to discussions of Muslim *Bangali* identity. Roy (1984) and Ahmed (2001) both trace a historical 'syncretism' in terms of an assemblage of both *Bangali* and Muslim practices and beliefs, giving way to a 'syncretic' *Bangali*-Muslim identity. In the context of Bangladeshi secularism, *Bangali* culture became axiomatic for the secular, in that the secular was seen as needing to provide a space for *Bangali* and Muslim practices and identities to co-exist. While the secular, read in this way, is meant to be a productive space bringing together different identities, it also insists on their separation. Hashim Mama's approach is a means, I argue, to undo this separation.

How to be a good Muslim of the middle or upper-middle class and in Bangladesh, given its colonial and pre-independence history, continues to be an important question for many of my interlocutors. Munem Wasif's mixed media installation project *In God We Trust* (2013)

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[35] Western secularism particularly makes specific assumptions of what constitutes the private and the public and the very definition of these categories. Such delimitations are highly contestable and offer a very limited view of the relationship between the body-self and others.

explores the perceived duality of being Muslim and *Bangali* through interviews and photographic essays of people in Dhaka. There is no conclusion, just an implicit understanding that this debate will continue. Hashim Mama is very aware of these debates, having read broadly in academic literature around the subject, but also through personal experience. This is both a sign of class in terms of affordance (he has the time to read and keep learning) but also of class in terms of education. I read his equating of religion and culture as a way out of this perceived duality.

Starting with Hashim Mama's story, I focus on the politics of difference presented in his conception of everyday religion and culture. I show how this is a means for Hashim Mama to negotiate plural identities and forge his own religious-secular becoming, which is still very tied to academic conceptions of Muslim and *Bangali* cultural identity. While not everyone would take the same approach that Hashim Mama does, all my interlocutors expressed concerns over how to live within different identity categories. I see this negotiation of identities as important to their religious-secular becoming.

I deconstruct the relationship between religion and culture further in the context of Ramadan in the city space of Dhaka, the space and time when Hashim Mama and I first had this conversation. Specifically, following the construction of secularism in Bangladesh as the potential to provide space for religious pluralism and Muslim and *Bangali* identities (and the state's failure to allow this), I look at the mutually exclusive idea of religion as ritual and sacred, and culture as everyday and secular. I explore Ramadan as a ritual that takes up space and life in the city as a meta-ritual; it thus opens up my interlocutors, their practice, their relationships, religious discourses, and boundaries between the transcendental and the everyday to renegotiation. Negotiation, a concept I draw from Robbins (2013) and the anthropology of ethics, allows us to conceive of how my interlocutors navigate the complexities of religion-secular experience and their own positions in the everyday and in Dhaka today. Religion is no longer narrowed down to ritual, culture alone does not have purchase on the everyday. It does not surprise me that Hashim Mama's initial comment about religion being culture came during Ramadan. It is a time when the boundaries between ritual and everyday, religion and culture are allowed to collapse on one another. Of course, this is not exclusive to Ramadan, this happens outside of the holy month as well, and it does not happen without tensions. In the same way that the physical boundaries and manifestations of religion in the city can lead to contestation, as I explored in the thesis introduction, how Ramadan should or should not happen is also an important point of negotiation. I take the experience of Ramadan as a ritual

in Dhaka to think of the city space as part of how religious-secular experience is negotiated amongst my upper middle-class interlocutors.

I then turn to stories of *djinn* inhabiting Dhaka to show how *djinn*, as beings deeply tied to Islam and belief, are also very much experienced without belief also. Stories of *djinn* speak to my interlocutors' religious-secular becomings. Throughout my fieldwork, I found that, to many, *djinn* are an integral part of the pluriform, intersubjective city space of Dhaka. I thus end with a discussion talking to Rani, a friend with whom this thesis began, and Rashed, a mutual friend of Rani's and mine, about their relationships to *djinn*. In this way, I think about how these beings created by God, alongside humans and angels, are part of the experience of everyday life for some in Dhaka regardless of faith or religiosity. I invite a conversation to think about how religion is juxtaposed to culture and the secular (religion's other Other), and how experiences of these converge within the plural identities of my interlocutors. Naveeda Khan (2008) has made a compelling case to think of *djinn* as part of everyday urban life. More fundamentally, however, she talks about the presence of *djinn* and the negotiation of relationships to them as a way to navigate religious differences. This itself is a fundamental part of what the everyday is. I similarly conceive of my interlocutors' relationships to *djinn* in this way. Particularly because *djinn* are such ambiguous beings, they provide a lot of ground for navigating religious differences and about feeling differently about one's (non)belief and (non)practice in Dhaka today.

Ambiguous Distinctions

I return to Hashim Mama's quote from the beginning of this chapter: "Looking back, this was actually cultural. Now it is one culture…everything religious is cultural." This was embedded in a wider (and very open-ended and unstructured) conversation starting with Ramadan – an event, time or series of events that happens and is taken part in every year – and going back through his life history. Mama was a passionate storyteller and, as narrators often tend to do, he veered off on tangents or rather took the reins of the interview/story into his own hands. Rather than being handed and regurgitating a clear understanding of what his words meant, here I try to build up to his understanding of religion as culture through the narrative trajectory of the interview/conversation.

Hashim Mama told me that he grew up in Dhanmondi in a middle-class Muslim household he described as religious and very ordinary for the time. Asking of his religious practice in the way that is common in Dhaka, he answered: "We prayed mostly regularly, read

the Quran, and of course we practised Ramadan and celebrated Eid. We loved *roja*[36], even my kids now – you've seen them – they also love *roja* Eid[37]." His description of Eid was what prompted him to say "everything religious is cultural:"

> Everything religious is cultural. Its structure is highly theological. So at my home this was a great influence. My *phuphu*[38] taught us how to say *namaz*[39], the need for *namaz*. Our parents didn't practice themselves, but they would say to us "go pray". They still say this. But now we don't hear. This was our family's orientation. And my *nani*[40] used to tell us stories in bed, of the old prophets, Joseph, Yusuf, Dawud, Moses. This gave us our religion. This is what is cultural. I feel very bad towards my children, they don't get these stories from their grandparents. They know other stories. These stories shaped me as a Muslim. Everything came from there. But things changed dramatically in me. When I was about six or seven or five, when I was very small, something came to my mind that changed my life. I figured out that Allah can hear everything. So He knows everything that is inside me. So I started to talk to Him. It became a normal practice.

In my reading of Mama's words, culture and religion are folded into each other through stories that create faith, discourse, feelings, memories and identities through their power to affect and the power of people to be affected. However, memory is also politically, historically and powerfully situated. Memory is also not fixed. Samia Khatun's (2018) work similarly uses non-English stories and narrative styles to map the histories and voices of South Asian and Muslim peoples, subsumed and silenced under British imperialism in Australia. She shows how stories, dreams and memories, of one life or passed down through generations, are themselves archives that can tell different things that go beyond the othering principles of the coloniser vis-à-vis the colonised subject. Stories are thus generative and enlivening, forming subjects both as narrators and as listeners (cf. Hirschkind 2005, 2020; Mbodj-Pouye in press).

Hashim Mama thought of stories as carrying over something vital that has affected his becoming. Stories become or beget culture/religion because they are relational and (trans)formative. They are shared between generations, they are told, heard and repeated

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[36] Fasting.

[37] *Eid-ul-Fitr*.

[38] Paternal aunt.

[39] Daily prayers for Muslims.

[40] Maternal grandmother.

between body-selves and they emplace these body-selves in a particular time and space (childhood, 1970s, Dhaka, night, bedroom, bedtime). The doing of the hearing/listening and telling/speaking and the repeating of this process is like the disciplining that Mahmood (2005) speaks of in relation to the moving, feeling body shaping the selves of her interlocutors in Cairo. The absence of these stories and the experience of listening to them from the lives of Hashim Mama's children was concerning to him. He was afraid they would not have access to the same resources to cultivate and become in the way that he thought is vital. His concern extends beyond merely being religious or their belief in God, and struck me as being more of a concern for who they are and how – through what means and paths – they might become.

The stories that he heard, as a child and through his *nani*, and the presence of his *phuphu* were events and habits that allowed him to shape himself and to carve out his own approach to *iman*[41] and God. In the same interview, he went on to say:

> In my view, I was not into rituals. I didn't do much of that. Sometimes I did, but in my core I became religious. Not out of any theories or readings but in my core I became religious. This is very significant for my religious journey. Then I started reading. [Priyanka: What did you read?] I started reading the Quran. I read the *surah* myself. When I say myself I mean my own translation and understanding. Some readings were mandatory for us, every weekend our *hujur*[42] would come and we would have to read. At the time this was normal in everyone's home. So we had to. And that was the time in class at home when we had to read, but we couldn't do anything with it...When I read, I would read in Arabic, but I started to read with my own translation.

Hashim Mama's *hearing* of stories allowed him to engage with the stories he *read* in his own way. On the one hand, he said that ritual and scripture were not important to him, but at the same time hearing stories affected him in a way that he was able to read the *surah* and imbue them with a meaning of his own.

Hashim Mama's point was to show that he believed and practised (and did not practise) in his own way. I see his thinking of religion as culture as a means to negotiate precisely this important part of his identity. Religion and culture, in this sense, do not appear as separate categories, but they fold into each other. By creating an ambiguous distinction, he is able to

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[41] Belief or faith in Islam. "Assumes belief in the oneness of God, angels, prophets, revealed books, and the hereafter" (Esposito 2003).

[42] Religious instructor or scholar, also used to imply that somebody is religious.

make space for himself, his religiosity, his identity. This in itself may be read as a position of privilege, perhaps not everyone is able to make these claims and live out their positions freely. As a wealthy, married and gainfully employed upper middle-class man, Hashim Mama is well aware of his own positionality within Dhaka. At the same time, I also construe it as a necessary and important method for him to emplace himself in Dhaka and the world to allow himself to be and become in a way that is important to him.

I do not simply relate this to his identity as a religious person. Rather, his hybrid identity also comes out in his positioning as upper middle-class, both local in Dhaka and in a globalised sense. Srivastava (2009) points to the multiple ways in which middle-class identity is understood and used by people (in India) to self-identify. 'Middle-class' is thus a rather "amorphous" term (ibid.: 338). In a similar vein, Hashim Mama and I often fell into discussions of what the middle-class is, where the distinctions between the upper and middle-classes may lie. He positioned himself squarely in the middle-class. As a man of *Bangali* ethnicity[43] with an American education and passport, he is able to live and occupy the spaces of Dhaka and the world in more plural and privileged ways. Yet, as Bhabha emphasises, capitalism and class are not the only subsuming categories of difference and identity (1994: 6; cf. Raghavan 2017). In other words, they alone cannot account for identification around, specifically, sexuality, gender and race. This, to me, acts as a reminder not to assume that privilege in a postcolonial setting adds up to the same privilege as being white, particularly male and heterosexual, and centred in the Global North. What is more important here is to look at the negotiation of identity, privileged or not, in the interstices within the categories of class, culture, race/colour and religion. To my mind, Hashim Mama's thinking of religion as culture, understood in ways specific to his class in Dhaka and to the history of secularism in Bangladesh, as the same is an important part of this negotiation.

This becomes even more significant when I consider how Hashim Mama brought up the attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery in July 2016. A dark moment in Dhaka's recent history, the Holey Artisan Bakery attack was perpetrated by a group of young men who took both locals and foreigners hostage, killing twenty-two people overnight, allegedly according to whether they were able to recite the Quran adequately (The Daily Star 2016). Besides the atrocity itself, the middle-class backgrounds of the perpetrators and the quintessentially upmarket space of the bakery came as a shock to Dhaka's middle and upper-classes. Not only were the attackers

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[43] Bangladesh is home to numerous ethnic groups, including indigenous populations, but also families whose origins are in areas now in India or Pakistan. Even amongst the middle and upper middle-classes, being non-Bangali can be a difficult position of otherness, if not outright dangerous.

middle-class but, as one author at the Dhaka Tribune remarks, they were from English medium schools too (Islam 2019). The fact that this is remarkable bears the assumption that a Bangla medium education is more likely to produce religious extremism than an English one. This further reflects on the educational divisions among the Bangladeshi, and particularly Dhaka's, middle and upper-classes, which I reflected on in greater detail in chapter three. In addition, it highlights the complexity and multiple identities that middle-class people in Dhaka occupy as postcolonial subjects.

The religious nature of the attack, the privatised and exclusive space it occurred in, and the educated background of the attackers were the main concerns for most of my friends and family. But Hashim Mama's concern was more with the wider implications of how politics functions and how religion as an institution and being religious are formulated in particular ways in Dhaka and Bangladesh. This, to me, speaks to Samia Huq's (2013) discussion of the power of secularism to control and form Islam as a religion and religious Muslim subjects through state institutions. In Hashim Mama's words:

How should I say this – Holey Artisan broke our perception of our society. I went for *jummah*[44] three days after the attack, to the *masjid*[45] next door. This was the congregation of the same area as Holey. And this was not even mentioned during the *jummah*. How absurd is this? How absurd. Seeing this, where is religion? It has nothing to do with society. It has nothing to do with anything, it's just a political play which is being repeated by everyone without knowing why it is being played or who it is being played for. It's always this. Religion has become completely irrelevant. Why has it become irrelevant in our society? Because of politics. But it's extremely relevant. Every day. To help people understand the context. It's extremely important. But practically it's totally unimportant. If you end or shut down religion, the world won't work. Many think that religion dictates ethics. But actually it doesn't….If there was no religion, if it was just based on ethics, we could have gone out and found our own religion. That would have been good. Now I see how religious institutions are trying to kill religious-type people. Society responds that way. It's very weird. [Priyanka: What do you mean?] … In society there are political institutions that hold onto society. It's convenient for them. If we don't understand this, they are more powerful. They can do their thing, and

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[44] Friday prayer.
[45] Mosque.

I can feel that I am all free and fine. So I see that if we can challenge this power, we can get to some truth. Serious truth. This is power.

Hashim Mama's account of the Holey attack is more than a liberal critique of orthodox religion and institutions, like mosques or *jummah* prayer, as well as orthodox religious practitioners. Neither is he locating the event of the attack within the context of 'political Islam', a term he used earlier on in the interview and with which he does not identify. His argument was that (a) religion does not dictate everyday ethics, political institutions do in Dhaka, (b) these control local religious institutions, which in turn are (c) "killing" religious people. On the one hand, Hashim Mama's analysis could be considered critical of religious institutions, arguably a secular practice, but he is equally critical of ostensibly secular institutions like the state, and finds religion to be necessary for ethical development, at least in the world as it is now.[46] This speaks to or of what I identify as Hashim Mama's religious-secular becoming, in which he borrows from Islamic faith, practice and stories, as well as from the (arguably) secular.

Moreover, the lack of space for developing ethical religious subjectivities is, in Mama's view, an issue of political control, which I also identify, in line with Huq (2013a, 2013b), Mahmood (2005) and Jamil and Doha (2017), as part of the secularising project of the state. Within this void, plural religiosities and hybrid identities have limited range of motion to become, or at least so appears to be the aim. Equating religion and culture is Hashim Mama's attempt, in my view, to counteract the kinds of discussions in Bangladesh that require secularism to provide for religious pluralism and make space for plural *Bangali*-Muslim identities (Mohsin 2000; Uddin 2006; Rahman 2012). These discussions invariably reproduce the logics of the state whereby religion must be politically controlled for the sake of a shared civic identity and society. Yael Navaro (2002) and Iqtidar and Gillmartin (2011) describe how society and public life shape and reproduce the logics and actions of states. While on the one hand the state is thought to stand above society in that the former necessarily must be separate in order to govern the latter, society nevertheless influences the kinds of forms and decisions the state takes. In the context of Bangladesh, the state and governing Awami League Party's responses to 'Islamic extremism', manifested in such events as the Holey attack, both reflect particularly upper middle- and upper-class (Muslim) desires for 'safety' whilst not removing

[46] I have not had the opportunity to ask him, but something about the way he describes things here, though very much embedded in the context of Bangladesh and Dhaka, implies that he is speaking of a global ethical condition rather than one that is exclusive to Bangladesh.

Islam and religious practice from the state itself (for example, through starting ceremonies with surah recitations, or supporting Islamic activist networks) (cf. Raqib 2020).

Hashim Mama's approach is, to my mind, essentially an attempt to depoliticise religion, something the Bangladeshi state is in its own way also trying to do by exerting 'secular' control over it. More than a personal solution, Hashim Mama's words hint at a desire to see religion as cultural in order to take power out of the equation, creating space for 'religion' to be fully part of 'culture' so that it can take its 'proper' place in people's ethical lives.

Rather than assess the feasibility of this proposition, I see religion and culture being lived as the same identity as a way of negotiating identity within a political context that Hashim Mama experiences as controlling and unforgiving towards multiple modes of being. Rather than centre his interpretation of the Holey aftermath around the mosque leaders and preachers and their failure to mention Holey in their *khutbah*[47] – three days after and just around the corner from the event – Mama's judgement focused on the institutions that create infrastructures through which the edicts of religion become marginalised in the everyday. Feeling religion and culture is visceral evidence of the body-self to experience things otherwise in the midst of a political project that appears to want to cultivate religiosity and religious subjects on very particular (and ambiguous) terms, I read Hashim Mama's approach as a means to diffract (Haraway 1997; Barad 2007) these terms – religion, culture, politics. What is exposed are less 'whole' subjects and the moral negotiation that becomes a way for my interlocutors, like Hashim Mama, to understand, feel and explore their plural positions.

Ritual Matters and the Everyday of Ramadan

The space that Hashim Mama actively created for himself by defining religion as culture can also be traced during the events and spacetime of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting. Ramadan proved to be a time where I had more interviews and conversations, where my friends and interlocutors seemed most eager to engage in talking about religion. I take this as an invitation to think about the importance, or lack thereof, of practice and ritual. Religion and culture are seemingly divided into categories respectively dealing with the divine and ritual, the mundane and the everyday, mimicking the ostensible private-public divide of secularism. The way that Hashim Mama thinks about religion as culture challenges this. Here I link my interlocutors' discussions of ritual and practice with discourses on the everyday to complexify

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[47] Public preaching during Friday prayers.

this further. I take Ramadan as an experience to open up this conversation, imitating the very same way my conversations with my interlocutors opened me up to this thinking.

Saqib had similar views to Hashim Mama regarding the Holey attack, a topic we came to during Ramadan. However, his interrogation was of the scriptural basis the attackers were basing their actions on: "I don't understand how they can read the Quran and then do this in the name of religion."[48] He was in his late thirties at the time, and we became acquainted through one of my cousins and ended up speaking about our feelings towards religion over subsequent encounters. I spent a few evenings at his house with him and his wife, Maha, also within the upmarket tristate area, towards the end of my fieldwork. Though we had met some time prior, I first came to their home during Ramadan, a year after my first interview with Hashim Mama. I was not fasting this year due to illness, but I would take part in *iftar*, so Maha invited me over to eat with a few friends and family members.

Ritual was a prominent topic in our discussion with Maha and Saqib. "Everyone is so focused on ritual, that they completely disregard the meaning behind the Quran, behind prayer," they told me. They were disillusioned with what they perceived as misguided approaches to ritual as a form of religious demonstration and further saw it as being used as a distraction from meaning. Yet they were keenly involved in their own religious aspirations towards a practice that was meaningful to them. One of my earlier conversations with Saqib began with her talking about how he doesn't say *namaz*. "I don't say my prayers regularly, but I don't know why. I wish I did." I asked, revealing my own assumptions, "But isn't this quite normal? It doesn't have to be important to everybody." He rejected this, saying "No, I know that this is what I should be doing, but I don't. And all I can do is ask for Allah's forgiveness." Rather than say daily prayers, "I joined a reading group where we discuss the Quran. Actually, you should meet Maha's aunt, she introduced us. She's very learned." Saqib's religiosity was also influenced by Sufism, through Maha and her aunt, but also through his familial ties to a Sufi *pir* (saint) dynasty in West Bengal. Dhaka, Bangladesh and Bengal more broadly are home to many living and deceased Sufi saints, whose shrines are well visited and to which followers are attached. Some people, like Saqib, are attached to *pirs* and shrines to which their families have been connected, sharing a history of devotion, care and/or patronage.[49]

Maha's aunt introduced her to her Sufi tariqa. She said her prayers regularly, "but it wasn't always this way. I used to drink, never say my prayers. I came from a non-traditional

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[48] I did not record this interview, so the quotes I use come from notes I took right after.

[49] Many shrines are also visited when people are in need or, more nefariously, when they want to curse somebody for their own ends, a double-edged sword.

family, I didn't see a prayer mat or *tupi*[50] in the house growing up. Then, something changed." At this point, Saqib said, "Yes, she changed all of a sudden. And I don't know why. I used to be reading the Quran in the room next door from where she'd be watching TV. And suddenly, she is saying her prayers." Maha herself did not want to say what changed, "I don't want to give a rational explanation for this….But praying is sharia, it's there to be followed. I don't believe in Sufis who say they won't pray, won't fast. It is the way to truth. The aim is to let go of the ego by invoking Allah's names." I asked if this is possible. She answered "Yes, but it won't happen for everybody…All religions are equal, they lead to the same path. But you can't mix them, that will cause you to stray."

Both Maha and Saqib, living in the same home, emphasised the importance of daily practice and ritual, though they lived this in very different ways. For Saqib, Ramadan provided a point of rejuvenation where practice can take place. Similar to Saqib, as I describe earlier, Hashim Mama was passionate about Ramadan since childhood, a fervour which he saw in his children as well. "Ramadan was a very exciting thing. I think when I was 10 or 11 years old I started fasting properly…During Ramadan, I fast the whole month. I won't drink and I won't smoke." I often saw Mama cooking alongside Zara Mami, his wife, a brilliant cook – together they prepared delicious *iftar* treats. Yet he did not practise outside of this month, and, like many, the end of Ramadan, known as *chanraat* (literally moon night), begins for him with the traditional shoe-shopping, and the less normative but also common alcohol and smoke – in Mama's case, whiskey and a cigar.

Schielke (2008) describes how smoking (often hashish, which is less contentious than consuming alcohol in Islamic scripture) and drinking are a way for young men in particular to deal with boredom. In Dhaka, boredom might certainly be part of it, but, as I detail more deeply in chapter five, smoking and drinking were a means to have fun afforded specifically by their class - rather than drinking locally brewed alcohol varieties or smoking local *biri* cigarettes, they would consume expensive imported liquors and cigars. Hashim Mama was also not fixated on scripture or rituals, and he loved to crack jokes about people going to hell, which I do not think he was bothered about at all. As I expand on in chapter six, being part of the world was important to him in terms of taking part in everything available to him, including things like travelling, meeting new people, fasting, cultivating his "spirituality" or attending *pir* festivals. I situate his consuming of drinking and smoking in similar ways, both as a part of his personal

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[50] Scull cap worn by Muslim men.

history (he had grown up with smoking and drinking around him) as well as his class, where these forms of consumption are a point of privilege.

But like all my Muslim interlocutors, Hashim Mama abstained from smoking and drinking during Ramadan. Following Ramadan, some people will try to keep up the practice they developed during the month of fasting. But usually this energy dissipates over time, only to be rekindled again during the next Ramadan. One of my uncles and aunts, Saif Mama and Sadia Mami, experienced it this way. Sadia Mami told me, "I try to continue after Ramadan but usually it stops after a few months. I don't say my prayers usually, though I try sometimes, when I feel like it. Your Mama," she smiled, "he won't go to mosque normally". Like Saqib and Hashim Mama, Saif Mama and Sadia Mami did not practise throughout the year but were very attached to the rituals and life of Ramadan, and they saw Eid as a time for fun and indulgence. For Saif Mama and Sadia Mami, Ramadan, though formally over, had its aftereffects.

This can be made sense of best with more recent theories on the possibilities of ritual and its relation to the everyday. Both the works on ritual of Saba Mahmood (2001) and Joel Robbins (2016) theorise how the boundaries between religious ritual and the everyday are both firm and blurred. As Mahmood (2001) suggests, ritual cannot be made distinct from the everyday through a set of dichotomies like "stereotypical versus spontaneous action, rehearsed versus authentic emotions, public demeanour versus private self" (2001: 827). Rather, ritual, in the form of *salat* (daily prayer) in the context of Cairo, becomes the space for the cultivation of an ideal self. This self isn't contained in the ritual space, but it is meant to exist beyond the ritual as well. The self-cultivation in ritual extends into life.

On the other hand, Robbins (2016) emphasises the transcendental nature of religion as powerful in not only stipulating values, but also creating environments which allow people and communities to engage with them. Writing against the everyday, Robbins speaks of the 'leaping out' of the everyday which religion, in the form of ritual, affords in order to create values. Robbins does not suggest that reflection and ethical meaning making do not occur within the everyday. His point is rather that the reflections and "evaluative impulses that saturate ordinary life" (2016: 780) are brought about by desires and values rooted in the transcendental realm of religion. Transcendence, through the experience of ritual within the physical confines of the church, allows for values to become desirable, though not unquestionably, which gives rise to conflict, ambiguities, differences.

Whereas Mahmood locates agency in the forming and practising of ritual (in her case, *salat*), Robbins finds agency in the aftermath of ritual – in the everyday – after values have

been formed and made desirable. The purview of the agent, then, is to accept, challenge, and negotiate in the everyday that which has been made desirable in ritual. For both, something particular is happening, being formed during the process of ritual, which then extends into or is contended within the everyday.

Samuli Schielke offers a different argument in that, speaking of the lives of young men in a North Egyptian village during Ramadan, the morality cultivated during Ramadan can actually stay in Ramadan. "Not only does it mix ascetic discipline with fun and entertainment, it is also part of a time of exceptional morality that, by its nature, will only last as long as Ramadan lasts, and that by virtue of its temporally limited nature indirectly legitimizes less consistent approaches to religion and morality for the rest of the year." (Schielke: 2009: S25). In all three cases, the ritual period is necessarily distinct from the everyday, even if the boundaries are blurred, as Mahmood (2001) shows. Whereas Mahmood's work tends to focus on a wholesome pious subject, Robbins overstates, in my view, the separation between the everyday and ritual, and Schielke does not make room for aspirations to make the virtues and moralities cultivated during Ramadan part of the everyday.

I understand Ramadan to be experienced by Sadia Mami and Saif Mama as a variation of all three examples where Ramadan stands as a ritual through which the everyday is not only negotiated, but to which the boundaries are rather fluid. The aim is to make the cultivation of correct, normative practice (as scripturally and socially given) – sometimes also a closer relationship to God – attained during Ramadan part of the everyday all year round. At the same time, the outcome is more ambiguous and often ends in the ideal not being reached. Rather than construe this as 'failure', the aim does not actually always have to be attained. To borrow from Naveeda Khan's theoretical vocabulary (2013), striving and aspiration is the more important concept here.

Moreover, there is something important in this instance, particularly for Hashim Mama and Saqib, of separating Ramadan as a ritual from the everyday. The possibilities it offers for connection (to *iman*, God, *sharia*), reassessment and normative practice are vital. Ramadan provides crucial opportunities for rethinking personal religiosity, oneself, connections to family and God, as well as to politics, place and events (some cyclical, repetitive like Ramadan) that they experience. The fact that my conversations with Hashim Mama, Maha and Saqib happened during Ramadan is, to me, testament to this fact. It is a moment of plural possibilities, including the possibility of practising normatively (which to Maha seemed somehow out of reach).

Mahmood's (2001) and Robbins' (2016) approaches in particular offer a seemingly contradictory approach to ritual and the everyday. The former illustrates that they are

imbricated, while the other reads them apart. My point is that both are possible and important, particularly in the case of Ramadan. An image of Dhaka during Ramadan may further help elucidate this idea of Ramadan and the everyday as both imbricated and quite separate. Ramadan really challenges the fabric of the city and upper middle-class life.

In material terms, Ramadan affords a new rhythm to daily life, with the usual 5pm rush-hour beginning earlier, as professionals leave offices earlier to be home in time to prepare and partake in *iftar,* or people going out after their offices close for *iftar* at a restaurant with friends or partners, or in the middle of the night for *sehri* (meal taken before beginning one's fast). Saqib, however, will not break fast outside of his home and away from his family for the entirety of Ramadan, a custom which most people observe in the first week of fasting. Being outside of home or a social space during iftar is eerie in that a sudden lull descends over the city as people leave the public space to say prayers and break fast indoors. Having gotten caught in traffic and not making it home in time, I once found myself in a Gulshan supermarket during *iftar*, when all the shop assistants sat down on the floor to share buckets of *chhola* (chickpea/lentil) and other typically *iftari* snacks for half an hour or so, with others like myself finding ourselves lost in a suddenly quite silent Dhaka, only to slowly spring back to life when people's energies were revived for the evening. Ramadan is thus quite a literal experience in the urban context. It causes Dhaka and its people to shift gears, reconfigure and reorient both the space and themselves. In this reading, the city itself is a subject and alive to these changes. People and place mutually have the capacity to affect each other. Together, the boundaries between the everyday and ritual are spatially blurred as well as definitively given. Dhaka looks, feels and smells different during Ramadan. But it also provides an everyday, one where work, family, commuting, socialising and praying are still there, but may be experienced differently. By looking at Ramadan in a spatial-temporal way, the different versions of Ramadan show it to be a plural experience.

Zonera's story speaks of this connection between space-time and the experience of Ramadan. She is a middle-aged professional living in the tristate area with her husband, Naveed. I lived with them for some time when I first moved to Dhaka. They were invaluable guides to me in getting to know and navigating the city, its spaces and its people, speaking Bangla properly, and learning to pray. They were orthodox practitioners and believers, in the sense that they said *namaz* every day, went on *hajj* and *umrah*, did not drink, only ate halal

food, fasted consistently, prayed during the night of forgiveness of *Shab-e-Barat*[51], and fulfilled their sacrificial duties during Qurbani Eid[52]. Ramadan, as all religious practice, is a fact of Zonera's life, which is very much tied to the space of Dhaka and Bangladesh. Like all my interlocutors, she really enjoyed Ramadan, something she imparted to me during the Ramadan I spent at her house.[53] Speaking of her brother in America, she told me "I understand him, he doesn't pray or fast much. How should he? Nobody else is doing it." Not practising in a society or community in which Islam is not predominantly practised made sense to her. She felt that being in Dhaka where fasting and praying are common was much easier.

At the same time, Ramadan is not a repetitive event that looks and feels the same every year. Thinking of space, not as place, but as a dimension through which time exists, Zonera's story hints at the varying ways in which Ramadan is experienced from year to year, by the same person in the same city. During our second Ramadan together, Zonera did not read the whole Quran, a common practice during Ramadan and the way she was used to practising habitually. She felt guilty about this, but not towards God, rather in the sense that she felt she was not doing something good for herself. She told me, "I'm not really practising this time the way I usually do. I feel bad, I should be doing this for myself but somehow I'm not doing it." Moreover, this year it came as a surprise that Zonera and Naveed had argued about Naveed not attending *tarabeeh* prayers[54] at mosque with the other men living in their gated community. She would say her *tarabeeh* prayers at home, but as a man, she expected him to attend mosque every day during Ramadan. Naveed was not a daily practitioner before they were married, but she had encouraged him to take up daily practice as she wanted to live in a household where the tenets of Islam and Islamic practice were observed. His retort was to make use of, to him, similarly gendered logic and suggest that she wear a *burqa* (Zonera did not habitually wear the veil). Ramadan was thus a space for further discussing the observance and gendered practice of religion within their household.

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[51] The night of forgiveness, filled with prayer, celebrated on the fifteenth night of the month of Sha'ban, the eighth month of the Islamic calendar.

[52] *Qurbani* or *Korbani* means sacrifice. It refers to *Eid-ul-Adha*, a celebration of Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice Ismail and Ismail's survival. It falls on the tenth day of *Dhu al-Hijjah*, the month when the *Hajj* (pilgrimage) is performed.

[53] I had lost my fervour for Ramadan some years ago. It has come back to me since living in Dhaka and staying with Zonera.

[54] These are long prayers, involving lengthy readings of the Quran and performing multiple *rakahs* (one cycle of daily ritual prayer in Islam; each one of the five daily prayer times demands a different number of *rakahs*). I only knew my friends and interlocutors to attend these at mosque during Ramadan and Eid, but *tarabeeh* are not limited to these occasions.

Isa's understanding is illuminating of the conditions which Ramadan offers which allow these reconfigurations and discussions to take place. Isa is a good friend and was crucial, in the most surreptitious and unassuming way possible, in helping me make friends in Dhaka. We often spoke about our respective work, but rarely did I think of taking notes or formally engaging him as an interlocutor. Yet our conversation on his fasting, or lack thereof, during my second Ramadan in Dhaka offered interesting thoughts. This conversation happened on the phone. Isa was going to come to Dhaka later that month but for now he was based in the UK. Isa was from a middle-class family, whose father ran a business in Old Dhaka (these are usually small-scale, artisanal, wholesale or retail oriented). "I don't pray, but I do *jummah* in Dhaka, sometimes in London." It was Isa who would later introduce me to an inclusive *jummah* in London that I would start attending during my PhD. Isa had never been particularly attached to ritual, "But I fast. I'm hella Ramadan. It's easy…What's interesting is that during *roja*, there's no temptation from the devil, right? This is canon. So that's what makes it special. People could technically do what they want without repercussions – that's why they don't. So that's why *roja* is good, it's easy to take part." The space of Ramadan as one where there is no temptation provides the ground for practising normatively, for attending to one's religiosity, to oneself.

At the same time, Ramadan is spatially and temporally situated. Hence, it is not always experienced the same way. Isa went on to say, "I don't feel so individual outside of *roja*. I don't feel the need for a personal relationship to God, though technically this is in the depths of canon. I'm not sure I need that." During this year's Ramadan, however, things were different:

> I'm not fasting consistently this year. It's weird, don't know why. I wonder how it's going to be next year. [Priyanka: Do you feel guilty?] No, actually I don't. Guilt's not my thing, it's yours. Maybe a bit of meta-guilt, like why don't I feel guilty when I should? [Priyanka: Would it be different if you were in Bangladesh?] Na, I did *roja* in South America even during intense labour. See, that's what I mean, *roja* is easy for me. I guess I don't feel the need to do it because I find it easy.

Ramadan being temporally and spatially located to me does not only signify a ritual with local inflections. Rather, it situates Ramadan as an experience. On the one hand, this is very much defined by class and taste, as I discussed in chapter three. But the experience of Ramadan can vary. The space and moment in which Ramadan is experienced can affect how a person feels about it and practices, as Zonera points out, yet it doesn't necessitate a given outcome. As Isa

says, being in Dhaka or Bangladesh (at home, with family, in an environment where it is being observed all around) would not make him fast more or less.

Saqib, Hashim mama, Isa, and Zonera's stories suggest a heightened sense of reflection during Ramadan, but also the opportunity to interrogate and raise issues without the full force of conflict. This implies a sense of Ramadan creating a space in which this is possible. Deliberation isn't reserved for after the ritual, as Robbins (2016) would have it. The overarching space – physical, temporal, emotional, religious – that Ramadan offers for multiple reflections and contestations to come to the fore is part of my interlocutors' processes to develop their religious-secular becoming, which extends further to the self, life and the everyday. For Maha and Hashim Mama, this involves dedication to Ramadan, but also being religious without practising regularly and normatively. Though, as is the case for Saqib, guilt may be involved, the embracing of Ramadan and the opening-up to non-orthodox religious practice outside of Ramadan, or alternatively secular or non-religious practices like drinking, allows different kinds of religious-secular becoming to take shape which feel right to them. For Isa, this also meant being open to not fasting consistently during Ramadan. For Zonera, on the other hand, consistent practice was the foundation of her religious life, and something she frequently mentioned as important for her existence. Nevertheless, her different experiences of and habits during Ramadan also highlight that Ramadan, as a ritual, is itself an experience and a performance. It is embedded in space, place and time and thus can always be experienced differently.

In the context of upper middle-class insecurities and aspirations of Dhaka as an ever changing urban space, marked by questions around religious-secular freedoms and class-based concerns around security; in a country marked by both economic growth and rampant poverty, as well as political instability, Ramadan is always going to be experienced differently, year on year. But it also provides the time-space for my interlocutors to consider their religious aspirations and feelings, not setting aside their class aspirations and everyday worries entirely, but allowing their religiosity to move to the foreground. This version of Ramadan, and of subjects made through and experiencing Ramadan, implies a negotiation of different kinds of aspirations, as well as what the everyday should be or is through ritual, though this is not an entirely conscious process of cultivation, forming and disciplining. In this sense, the everyday cannot be equated with a secular version of culture that is separate from religion, or even as a version of religiosity from which ritual it bracketed off. As stories like Isa's or Zonera's suggest, sometimes people feel things or feel differently, which changes or confounds the experience of rituals and the everyday in profound ways. The constant navigation of

(non)practice and (non)faith within and between rituals, like Ramadan, and the everyday is part and parcel of my interlocutors' religious-secular becoming.

Negotiating Religious-Secular Becoming through *Djinn* and Shadows

The becoming I speak of, and which I traced in the stories of my interlocutors', is meant to provide space for experiences that are not solely religious or solely secular. This becomes more clear when looking at Rani and Rashed's experiences of *djinn*. Though *djinn* are beings specific to the Quran and Islamic cosmology, I show here that interactions with them occur beyond the bounds of faith and Islam. But to call this kind of experience secular or 'cultural' – words that can take on the same meaning here – also does not do justice to their experience. Moreover, the point is not just that my interlocutors are borrowing from the religious and secular camps separately, but that reading the religious and the secular apart is not really possible. Rather, as I show here, the experience of *djinn* for someone, like Rani, who did not actually believe in them, can also create unease regarding how faith, belief and experience relate. This is also a fundamental part of how religious-secular experience is understood and negotiated, and how it is formative of my interlocutors' religious-secular becomings.

Naveeda Khan (2006; Khan in Zyskowski 2014) has made a compelling case for thinking about *djinn* as forming relations and friendships with people. They are an integral part of the everyday and can express religious differences, if not outright sectarian violence, in the communities where they reside. Anand Taneja (2013; 2017) has made an equally poignant case for *djinn* as affecting plural spiritual experiences and non-state-sanctioned remembering in contemporary Delhi. Taneja's (ibid.) work is particularly important in that he emphasises a connection between spiritual experience and ecological surroundings, in this case within the city space of Delhi. Here I focus on the embodiment of *djinn* vis-à-vis the bodies of my interlocutors within the city space of Dhaka. Specifically, I explore how through their interactions with my interlocutors, they initiate moral negotiations in the everyday context of upper middle-class Dhaka.

Moreover, the other side of Khan's argument is that *djinn* are non-human parts of the world which have the potential to make humans "more like things" (Khan in Zyskowski 2014). I juxtapose Rani's story with Rashed's, for whom faith and practice were integral for understanding and negotiating his relations to *djinn* and Dhaka. I thus take *djinn* to be an important part of Dhaka's city space and highlight the importance of thinking of the contemporary city as more than human. Through Rashed's story, I suggest the city is representative of the material everyday. The city itself is not only a stage on which religious

and cultural differences are mapped out, but the divisions between them are also ambiguated through the material, more-than-human space of the city.

I begin with Rani's embodied experience of *djinn*. "I haven't been sleeping the last few nights," she once told me, "The shadows were here." This thesis began in Rani's home, where I partly lived (in Bashundhara) and spent much of my time. It was here that, over the course of our friendship, she would often share her stories of *djinn* with friends, particularly during periods when they were very present. She was a young (early thirties), professional, upper middle-class woman, educated at English medium institutions and a top private university in Dhaka, as well as in Australia through a scholarship programme. We met through Isa, a close friend to us both, whom she had worked with for several years. She had grown up in one of the army cantonments – gated communities coveted by many middle and upper middle-class people for their cleanliness, safety and relative quiet – as well as in Dhanmondi. The home she and her husband shared was full of life, including plants, cats, turtles, fish and at one point also a dog, and of course people. But in addition to living beings were also the *djinn* that frequented Rani's life and home.

Rani would refer to *djinn* as shadows. The word expressed a clearer image of how she perceived them and it also, to me, signalled a distancing from the idea of *djinn* due to their place in specifically Islamic cosmologies. As I detailed in the introduction, Rani was not sure anymore whether she believes or not, whether she needs to. "I'm not sure what I believe anymore. I used to pray a lot but I don't do anything anymore. Do I need religion? What do your people say?" She would ask about my research in this way, vicariously picking the minds of my other interlocutors. Her husband, Opu, would often tell her that they do not exist. She would relate this to me and add, "I know they don't exist, but then I still feel them." Speaking of shadows rather than *djinn* was a way to express the uncertainty that comes when moving between knowing, believing and feeling, giving her room to think about *djinn* differently, perhaps beyond the confines of a religious universe that she was not sure she lived in anymore, while still doing justice to her experience and feelings of them as real.[55]

Though Rani's relationships with shadows were generally not comfortable or ones that were based on friendship and reciprocity, her experiences would vary a lot. On one occasion, sitting on her sofa in Bashundhara, she recounted, "One of them was hovering over Opu while he was sleeping. There was a little girl crying next to me. And then every time I was about to

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[55] We have not discussed *djinn* or shadows recently, but she has hinted that her interpretation and analyses of her experiences with them has changed since we had these initial conversations.

fall asleep, one would grab my ankle and let it drop. It was bruised in the morning." Another time, she said, "I had sleep paralysis again. I'm scared to go to sleep. I just lie there and I'm awake, but I can't move. One of them is sitting on my chest and I can't breathe." Rani already has experiences of troubled breathing through her asthma. Moreover, her sleep paralysis, a medical term, is a very embodied and medicalised way of experiencing herself vis-à-vis the non-medical, always felt yet never seen, shadows. While she could not touch or control the shadows, they were very able to touch her. The embodiment of the shadows goes beyond a distinctly material manifestation, where touch is more than physical. In this moment, Rani's bodily agency was challenged by an immaterial yet entirely embodied shadow. Rather than possessing her from within, the effects of touch are outward in origin. She became trapped or affected from the outside.

This experience was very different for Rani's maternal grandmother. Rani grew up in her *nani's*[56] home with her brother, grandparents, uncles and aunts, along with an assortment of imported plants and animals from around South and Southeast Asia. *Djinn* were present and experienced by all her family members, directly or indirectly. While Rani was touched, visited and affected by *djinn*, she was not possessed by them. Her *nani*, however, experienced possession. Speaking of her experience of living with her possessed *nani*, Rani told me:

> My *nani* was possessed by one for years. She would scream and try to harm us. We had to watch her all the time. Somebody had sent them to do this. Eventually we found the *tabeez* [amulets] that had been put there to curse her. When I was younger and living at home, they would come to me in my dreams. I'd wake up with scratches all over and twisted ankles.

As she related this to me, she pointed out her wrists and arms where the scratches had been. Comparing Rani's own experience with her grandmother's brings out the very different ways in which *djinn* can be experienced. The embodiedness of Rani's experience of shadows expresses how belief may have very little to do with her experience. She could feel them, in all senses of the word. They could touch, hurt, reveal things, make her feel things – in other words, they affected her. They were absolute, whether she believed in them or not. "I know they aren't real but *tao* (still) they are here." This complicates potentially secular understandings of beings like *djinn* as experienced exclusively through belief. It also feels insufficient to say that this

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[56] Maternal grandmother.

experience is 'cultural'. Rani feels the shadows. The diffracted connections and differences between religion and the secular, the believer and the unbeliever, are here negotiated through embodied experiences of *djinn*. In this way, *djinn* and shadows lay bare the interstices between believing and not believing, revealing an identity and way of being that is more ambiguous than either can grasp.

Experience here is through the body and through touch specifically, rather than through language or discourse (Csordas 1999: 146). Karen Barad (2012) has written of touch as revealing the self within the other and the other within the self. Rani's experience of self, Dhaka/Bangladesh, her neighbours and family, and the world is affected by her relations to *djinn*, which cast doubt on her uncertainties about religion and faith. Barad's idea of revealing the self through touch, however, implies a certain reciprocity. But in Rani's case, the touching and being touched is one-sided. While Rani is certain of how they affect her – her sleep, her body, her family, her home, who she is – what is less clear is how she affects them. I emphasise here that the friendships that Khan (2006) found between her interlocutors and *djinn* in Lahore are not the experiences of Rani. Her relationships to shadows, on a more personal level, are much more ambiguous.

Rashed's story offers a counter narrative to Rani's, in that for him, belief was a fundamental part of his understanding and experience of *djinn*. We met in Rani's home in my first months of fieldwork. He was crashing on her couch for a few months before moving to Malaysia. We met up one afternoon for pancakes with a mutual friend at Rani's house (which at this point was in a cantonment community, down the road from where I was staying with Zonera and Naveed; her home was used by many of us as a communal living room, a node and point of connection). After our snacks, we sat under the fan in the living room to talk. His story was the first I really heard of *djinn* in Dhaka. To him, *djinn* were also very much embodied presences that interact and exert power through touch.

> I lived at a friend's place in Mogbazar[57] in Dhaka. And their grandfather used to own a *djinn*. He actually went through all that process [reciting *surah al-jinn* 40,000 times] and he was quite fearless. Signs that I have seen of the *djinn* being in that house are mostly when the children of that house were being arrogant with their parents, the *djinn* would come out of nowhere and just give them a slap, and you heard that slap. And you

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[57] Mogbazar or Mogbajar is a busy commercial neighbourhood in south-central Dhaka, administered by the Dhaka South City Cooperation.

hear their cheeks turn red. You could see fingerprints. So, my friend and both his younger brother and sister have been slapped by the *djinn* at some point. And the sister tends to get seizures where she just stiffens up and her eyes roll up so the white part shows, and she's just stuck like that for five minutes and then the *djinn* let's go...it was pretty scary.

In Rashed's narrative, *djinn* are made present through the intention, faith, practice, and "fearless" wherewithal of a human individual (his friend's grandfather). Moreover, the presence of the *djinn* is felt through touch (the slap), which here is disciplinary, and located somewhere between the intentions of the elders of the household (disciplining their children) and that of the *djinn* themselves. Though Rashed did not speak of seeing the *djinn*, of touching them himself or being touched by them, he could sense them and perceive the effects of their presence on other bodies.

This speaks to the ambiguous nature of *djinn*, which is also why belief in them is not unanimous. Among my middle and upper middle-class interlocutors, there are serious contentions about their existence and relevance. Many people are dismissive, yet many others feel their presence. As Barbara Drieskens describes, *djinn* "are invisible creatures, not absolutely evil but rather unpredictable" (2008: 13). They are one of the three intelligent creatures God created according to the Quran: "angels made of light, humans made of clay and *djinns* created from smokeless fire" (ibid.; my italics). My interlocutors, family and friends often spoke of them as possessing, foreseeing the future, offering particular insights to some, while harassing others. In all cases, they are very much able to interact with humans, particularly certain people with connections to them, either familial or otherwise. What their intentions are and how they can manifest and touch people is by no means straightforward.

People who do believe in them or do experience them handle this in different ways. Speaking more of living in his friend's house, Rashed said:

I lived there for about two and a half months holding my heart in my hands. And since I used to pray in my room, there was not much presence in that room. I always kept it locked, although that wouldn't help. Just the mother [prayed]. And not regularly and they had a pet dog. And it's believed in Islam that you can't have a pet dog inside the house, you can have it outside the boundaries of your house but not inside. Because they repel angels from visiting you and protecting you. Because in Islam, it is believed if you recite the *Ayat-al-Kursi* [throne verse] at least five times a day, you are protected

by 70 angels at all times, especially when you go out. Since that wasn't happening, I'd have this *Ayat-al-Kursi* framed up in my room. Somehow from that house I got my job at the ministry. I believe in all sorts of things, but I believe it was probably me praying those five times a day during the whole time. Although my friend is highly addicted to drugs, and his part of the house was kind of like a club...I feel it was amplified because of the presence of these supernatural figures…So many people murdered and buried underneath your house, something is meant to happen[58]. Even if it's true, your subconscious, something goes wrong at some point. People were injuring each other many times, and sometimes there would be fights. Coming out of nowhere, out of the blue. Sometimes there were fights regarding girls. And most of the time it was starting out of a mere conversation.

Rashed's story speaks of prayer and Quranic verses as both appropriated to create control, the willed presence of *djinn* (regardless of the intent), while simultaneously being the only way to counteract their power. It is through reciting the Quran, through saying *namaz* five times a day that he eluded their effect. He added that he did not pray anymore, not because he does not believe but because he just does not practice. But at that point in his life, in his friend's home, he did.

At the same time, his narrative suggests that *djinn* are not only tied to people, but very much to place. He explained this further by speaking of the history of the land on which his friend's house was built:

This house…used to be a mass graveyard during the war. So, what my friend's grandfather did, while being a religious man, is that he bought this land for a cheap price. And he purchased that whole piece of land, and he shared it among his brother and nieces and nephews. And they built houses there. But his particular house was on the mass grave. So, they dug out skulls, parts of bones and stuff from underneath while they were doing the construction.

Relating back to the Liberation War and its innumerable death toll, Rashed felt *djinn* are tied to the geography and history of place. While *djinn* can be placed somewhere through *tabeez* (amulets), as in Rani's *nani's* case, they are also able to inhabit spaces, like the house of his

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[58] Rashed was referring to unmarked graves from Bangladesh's Liberation War (1971).

friend, more easily than others. Khan (2006: 236) also speaks of the possibility to inherit *djinn*. In Rashed's narrative, *djinn* are not only passed down between people but also through their spatial-temporal emplacement. *Tabeez* (amulets) play a crucial role in this[59]. They can be placed to cast *djinn* into/onto the lives and bodies of people, by embedding them into the material environment that surround the person or object of their power:

> After their grandfather died, the jinn had been, as they say, watching over them. Because there are other *djinn* showing up at times. And their house is full of those things they call *tabeez*. You know those lockets that they make out of [metal] – this is not permitted in Islam, those who do it, they actually go outside of the religion to do it. They are amulets, these are like metal amulets with open ends on both sides, where you can put in inscriptions from the Quran, and you fold it up and wax it up, so it stays in there. Those who believe in them and use them sometimes get results, but mostly they get negative results…And my friend and his brother and sister, they haven't had a successful educational life, although they're brilliant people, anytime that they start getting some success at work, they are hindered by something at home. Which makes them stick to home, and they don't get up. Right now, my friend and his younger sister are both working. But then they are not able to get promotions because whenever it's time to perform really well, they're caught with some sort of illness or the simplest thing, like they can't wake up on time. Something's holding them back. And the scariest thing about that place is that once you turn the lights on in that place, even during daytime, you can't see anything. It's that dark. No sunlight comes in. Even though there are loads of windows. You can't see sunlight coming in there, you always have to have the light on.

Both amulets and *djinn* are ambiguous in their effects, and very much tied to a plethora of intentions and desires made real through the invocation of religious scripture in particular ways. *Djinn*, however, also have their own intentions. And amulets do not have to be physically placed somewhere. Rashed explained, "It's more mystical than that. If someone has made an amulet in your name, and located you somewhere, what they will do is do some of their chanting and summon *djinn* to come and put it inside your place."

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[59] *Tabeez* are made and obtained from specific religious practitioners, not necessarily *imams* or teachers, or healers (*kobiraj*), though not everyone will feel comfortable dealing with them. Wearing a *tabeez* for protection is one thing, but using them to curse or possess others is unsavoury business that is not taken lightly.

While Rashed and Rani have very different religiosities and experiences of faith and *djinn*, their experiences together express the ways in which religion (as faith, scripture, practice) is necessary in the presencing and experiencing of *djinn,* while simultaneously the experience of *djinn* is not contingent upon faith. In the same way that devout Muslims in Dhaka may not believe in *djinn* at all, Rani can both not believe and still experience them. Sometimes *djinn* just are, made material and relevant through their power to touch. They both can be invoked or are embedded through the particular alignments of place, history and the bodies that occupy that space. Rather than be left with a clear understanding of where religion ends and the secular begins, Rani and Rashed's stories show that *djinn* necessarily ambiguate these distinctions and provide further complexity for dealing with religious doubt and self-understanding, which I explore further in chapter five.

Conclusion

I started this chapter speaking of ambiguous distinctions between religion and culture. The way Hashim Mama understands religion as culture is a form of moral negotiation that is specific to Dhaka and his class today. Though not all my interlocutors would see religion as culture in the way Hashim Mama does, many, like Saqib and Maha, Sadia Mami and Saif Mama, similarly question the entanglements of religious life, ethics, the everyday, and social and political power in Dhaka. I believe Hashim Mama's understanding of religion as culture neatly reflects and challenges local academic and activists' terminologies of Islam and Bangali culture as separate but necessarily compatible within the context of secular Bangladesh and Dhaka.

By speaking of Ramadan and equating ritual with religion and the everyday with culture, I open up this image further. My aim was to show how neither religion nor culture occupy these spaces in distinct ways, and precisely through their ambiguities, they create the interstices where my interlocutors can rethink and develop their aspirations (as believers, religious practitioners or not, upper middle-class people, men and women) simultaneously and plurally. Thinking of Ramadan as a ritual and as a specific spatial-temporal context allows for these plural identities to be negotiated and seen, moving us away from an overfocus on a specifically ideal religious self, and more towards religious-secular becoming as it is negotiated through class.

Taking this further, I construed *djinn* as important in understanding the complexity of religious-secular becoming. Rani and Rashed's stories of *djinn* shed light on how belief is not always necessary for experiencing ostensibly Islamic beings. My point was to explore how faith and practise both empower and circumvent *djinn*, while in other instances, neither faith

nor practice might be involved at all. *Djinn* have the uncanny ability to affect others, to touch bodies, to limit people's agencies and simultaneously to extend that of others, to express intention while simultaneously being subservient to the intentions of others. *Tabeez* are similarly material and exist beyond the laws of material existence, offering both protection and promise, pain and stagnation according to the intentions of their maker. In the same way that Rani can perhaps not believe and still feel shadows, Rashed can live among *djinn* and not be materially affected by them through his faith and practice. More thank borrowing values and ideas from Islam and the secular simultaneously, as Huq (2010) suggests, the ways in which belief, practice and experience relate in Rani and Rashed's stories shows how we cannot neatly separate the religious and the secular into belief and lack of or compartmentalising of belief (cf. Latour 1993). Speaking of religious-secular becoming instead allows me to construe my interlocutors' religious subjectivation through layers of experiences, identities, (non)belief and practice.

Moreover, mapping this onto the city scape, by thinking of the space and place of the city, allows us to see how the city gives way to heterogenous, intersecting becomings, precisely through its material manifestation and through its power to interact with people, objects and other beings. In the following chapter, I focus more closely on the feelings of my interlocutors, something I have hinted at here, and how these have an orientating potential to guide them along different paths of becoming. While here I focused on my interlocutors' moral negotiation around religion and culture, practice and non-practice, ritual and the everyday, belief and non-belief, in the following chapter I focus on their feelings. Negotiation and orientation, I show, are mutually constituting processes. I engage my interlocutors' plural feelings around religious doubt and difference further through the multiple ways they inhabit the spaces of Dhaka.

Chapter 5: Spatial Orientations: Feeling Religious-Secular Difference

*Azia was a relative, though we only met as friends through Isa. I was close to her mother also and spent much time at their house and with her friends (who later became mine too). They lived in an apartment in Gulshan, sharing an extended apartment with her paternal relatives. "They are very religious," Azia said of her relatives, "we haven't spoken in years." Azia herself identified as atheist, using the word in English, and she enjoyed living a life without religious commitment, as well as smoking and drinking openly at home, a difficult feat for many women, even those of the upper middle-class. Their home was partitioned by a glass door, with Azia living her life on one side, and her relatives on the other. Over the many days and nights that I spent at her house, I rarely saw her move across this boundary, except to play with the children. Children, food and shared working staff (*kajer lok*) moved fluidly across the threshold, unifying a seemingly divided household. While the door seemed to function as a boundary, it also facilitated movement and interactions that gave way to negotiating differences and orienting each one in new ways in their shared home.*

Azia's story sheds light on how spaces of the city are inhabited in order to negotiate hybrid, plural identities (Bhabha 1994; Rosaldo 1989). She was a young, upper middle-class woman, born and raised in Dhaka, speaking Bangla and English at home, and mainly English at work, educated at an elite English school and a prestigious private university, worked in development and advertising, raised Muslim, educated herself in other religions, and now an avowed atheist. I highlight these qualities with which she identifies herself most regularly in her everyday and which, to my mind, speak strongly of the conditions of upper middle-class Dhaka today. This chapter elucidates these nodes of identity, how they intersect, and how they are negotiated through the spaces of Dhaka.

Azia's story, and the home space she created and inhabited every day, show how interactions with everyday spaces allow for orientation and reorientation along new paths of becoming. I connect her story with Arif's, a middle-aged man who had given up on Islam, but not on God. Doubt is central to both of their lives and religiosities, a feeling which I see as powerful in orienting them down alternative paths. Sara Ahmed's (2006) notion of orientation, which I use here, refers to how feelings towards objects propel people unto different directions, along different paths of becoming. The basis of Ahmed's queer phenomenology is that objects themselves, as points of orientation, are brought to the foreground (2006: 4). Orientation is the

process by which we find "our own way in the world by situating ourselves in relation to others" (ibid: 6). This becomes the basis of social differences, which are irrevocably "intercorporeal" (ibid. 5) and intersubjective. Moreover, while some paths are given or encouraged through dynamics of power, such as a heterosexual and heteronormative life, deviation from these and finding one's own path are made possible through feelings (towards objects), through disorientation and processes of reorientation (Ahmed 2006: 21).

What is interesting in Ahmed's understanding of orientations is a balance of feeling as socially or situationally defined, intentional, as well as from somewhere less definite, which I think of as coming from somewhere beyond the self. This could also mean feelings as brought about through divine intervention or a relationship to God and faith, but it is not limited to this interpretation. Feeling as a vehicle for acting and being a certain way is a theme that I found in all the stories of my interlocutors. They can propel people towards or away from different kinds of lives, tastes, interests, religiosities. Feelings thus play an important role in forming subjectivities, while also being an expression of these. Through the particular understanding of feelings as brought about by interacting with objects and others, feelings are powerful in orienting and reorienting people.

What I draw attention to here is how the feelings which my interlocutors, like Azia and Arif, describe are very much imbricated with the time and space in which people in Dhaka find themselves. In their introduction to a thoughtful volume on the emotional history of South Asia, Chatterjee, Krishnan, and Robb (2017) poignantly argue that feelings in the city provide "an archive of the affective traces of what it has meant to dwell in modernity" (ibid.: 557). Cities have become an important means for understanding modernity in terms of social, economic and political progress. The city, how it is planned, managed and inhabited, also sheds light on the relationship between religion and the secular in a particular place and time, and how this evolves (cf. Burchardt & Becci 2013). Rather than modernity, this chapter focuses on how feelings in the city offer a kind of propulsion towards different religious-secular becomings for my interlocutors. Simultaneously, emotions are a resource through which we can understand the possible presents and futures that people imagine for themselves. These feelings are crucially entangled with experiences of class and city space.

The second part of this chapter thus takes space as the object (point of orientation) and illustrates how Azia experiences herself through the particular spaces in Dhaka that she inhabits. Her movements around Gulshan and other parts of Dhaka, as well as within her own home, speak of how she herself is oriented by space and how she chose to reorient herself towards new paths, other religiosities and secularities, through her inhabitation of space. Ingold

and Vergunst (2008a) have illustrated how walking is very much part of the experiential fabric of everyday life (cf. de Certeau 1980). In this image, walking, thinking and feeling happen simultaneously and in relation to other body-selves that are also walking, thinking, and feeling simultaneously (Ingold & Vergunst 2008b: 2). Margrit Pernau (2014) similarly sees the body as a mediator between space, time, and emotion. The way my interlocutors feel in particular spaces and at particular points in time is both an expression of how space shapes people and how people shape space.

Azia's story and home then helps us consider how different religiosities are negotiated within shared spaces in Dhaka. Azia is an atheist living in a religious, Muslim household. She defined herself as an atheist, though she was also introduced this way to me by Isa. Her atheism is a strong part of her identity and one which is inscribed into the space she creates for herself and the spaces she inhabits. Many middle and upper middle-class families in Dhaka will know this scene well.[60] Taking Azia's experiences as a starting point, I continue with Ahmed's (2006) object-oriented phenomenology. I focus on the glass door partitioning the living space of her home to consider how space is used to negotiate difference, both that of others and oneself. This, I argue, is part and parcel of subjectivation, intersubjectivity and sharing space.

The politics around sharing space is intimately tied up to local ideas of 'liberal' and 'conservative'. In Dhaka, upper middle-class identities are very much articulated through these (English) terms, which are intimately tied up with the religious and the secular. The terms 'liberal' and 'conservative' are used to create, sustain and categorise specific identities and lifestyles in Dhaka. These play out within private as well as public spaces, though public space does not entail equal access across classes, ethnicities, genders and sexualities. This signals a rather reductive image of middle and upper middle-class people in Dhaka as divided into two camps, but it is very much a means by which people's identities, behaviours and the spaces they inhabit are understood. Hashim Mama, with whom I began chapter four, alluded to this perceived tension in his account of middle and upper-class responses to the Holey attack of 2016 (see chapter four).

I introduce the bodily practices of drinking and smoking as a common means by which my interlocutors understand the liberal and conservative. What emerges is that the liberal and conservative, while plural and imbricated, are used as a heuristic device not only to understand

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[60] Munem Wasif's multimedia piece 'In God We Trust' (2009-2016) explores the subjective and intersubjective experience of plural identities lived side by side in Bangladesh. Three videos played simultaneously, a series of black and white photographs, and a set of equally monochromatic pieces of text together make up this piece. Speaking from personal experience with his family and friends, as well as through the narratives of others, Wasif explores the experience of multiple religiosities and (what I call) hybrid identities in Dhaka today.

differences in ethics and identities, but also to maintain this difference. Difference here refer to different kinds of religiosities.

I then focus on the office environment as a particular kind of space where the tensions of the liberal and the conservative play out in plural ways. The office spaces of northern Dhaka are interesting in that many people from diverse parts of the middle and upper-classes come together. As such, class comes to play a crucial role in understandings of the liberal and the conservative also. I argue that while the value of the terms liberal and secular varies subjectively, there is a certain power and necessity of reading them apart. Even though it is clear from my interlocutors' stories that the liberal and the conservative are very much constructed and often contradictory, maintaining them as opposites is important for understanding and allowing for difference.

As I pointed out in chapters one and three, local media and the stories of my interlocutors are rife with concerns over the space of Dhaka and the place Islam has in it (see also Khondker 2009; Doha & Jamil 2017; Emroz 2017; Chowdhury 2020; Raqib 2020). What I explore here is how my interlocutors find potential for reorientation through the objects, spaces, and times of the everyday, through which people negotiate their identities and belongings. While I introduce atheism as an important category through which many upper middle-class urban dwellers in Dhaka experience themselves, I couple this with experiences of the religious as well in order not to assume a binary relationship and division of religion as conservative, secular as liberal. In order to treat these categories as fluid rather than mutually exclusive, I here explore the ambiguities of the terms while simultaneously showing how thinking of them as opposites is important to my interlocutors. At the same time, I think through how and why terms like liberal and conservative are important in constructing identities and differences, in terms of plural religiosities, in Dhaka today.

Religious Orientations through Feeling

Azia was a young, professional, upper middle-class woman who identified as an atheist. We met through Isa, though it turned out we had quite a few people in common. In English she told me, "I am an atheist. I don't believe in God or in organised religion. But I did try." She lived a non-practising life openly in a religious household. She attended one of the more elite English schools in Dhaka, and later one of the top private universities in the country. Now, she was working in communications, most often but not exclusively in Dhaka's booming development industry. For her, it was not only about the fact that she did not believe in God or religion, but the fact that this was the solution after a long process of trying to believe. Attempting to be

religious for a long time when she was a teenager, she has assiduously studied the major texts of Islam and Christianity the most (out of many others). "I tried to be Muslim, I tried to be Christian," she explains. "There was a time when I would pray and study the Quran a lot and, you know, I actually really liked some of the verses, they're very powerful." One evening we were sitting together in her living room, on the upholstered wicker chairs I had come to associate with her home, and she excitedly ran to a glass cabinet – partly displaying or holding glassware and crockery, and partly housing books – and retrieved a copy of a translation of the Quran, gifted by a cherished family friend. "If I could go to university again and study whatever I want," she told me, "I would study religious history, *mane* (meaning) all religious history."

What is important in Azia's story is not only the fact of being atheist, of no longer believing, but rather that this was a process of multiple orientations and reorientations. Her father was an influential figure in her religious-secular becoming, though he was living abroad and I never met him. "My father is a Dawkins atheist[61]. He raised me to be atheist. He is very judgemental about religion. So, when my mom or others would be praying or reading the Quran, he would say, 'you don't believe in this, do you?' But I didn't want to be like him. So I really tried to be religious." This was a point of connection for both of us, as I too had grown up with a religious mother and an atheist father. Though we both contended, in our own ways, with what we experienced as dogmatic (rather patriarchal) atheism, my choice or feeling was to be religious, whereas hers was to be atheist – but on her own terms. This does not mean that she does not judge others' religiosities or atheisms, but rather that whatever atheism or religiosity she follows, she wanted it to come from herself. Though I do not pinpoint an exact object or moment through which Azia reoriented herself towards atheism, her story conveys the need to think of feeling as important for religious-secular becoming. Feeling here is embodied in that pull towards or away from Islam, from this or that kind of atheism. While rationality, analysis, intention and choice are important to this process, so is the feeling that gives way to new or different ways of becoming.

Azia further spoke of the emphasis that religious leaders in Dhaka, particularly during mosque 'congregations', put on hell. Hearing *khutbahs*[62] at local mosques in Gulshan, she often found them to focus on messages she could not align herself with or which she outrightly rejected, such as that suicide bars the path to heaven. These messages troubled her, and she felt

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[61] Azia was here referring to the New Atheism movement's active approach to countering religious or spiritual belief. This approach that has been criticised on various grounds, for example, for demonising and essentialising religion as evil, broadly speaking. Richard Dawkins, to whom Azia refers, was a key figure of this movement.

[62] Friday afternoon sermons/prayers led by an Imam.

concerned for the ramifications of listening to them regularly. In this sense, Azia makes a clear distinction between the Quran as religious exegesis and the social manifestations of religious structures. To her, the former was not a source of belief, yet it has been and continues to be formative in her understanding of her own positions towards religion and her non-belief. She also saw the value in the Quran, finding some of its chapters meaningful and interesting. She did not use the Quran to argue against religion. Rather, being atheist was more of an orientation towards something else - not the atheism of her father nor the religion of her other family members, but something of her own.

Feeling was also integral to how Arif came to believe in God but move away from Islam. He is a middle-aged professional living on his own in a two-bedroom apartment in Bashundhara.[63] Arif is a distant relative with a sharp sense of humour, and I would often see him with Zonera and Naveed. We spoke one day in a coffee shop in Banani, where we would have *phuchka* and *deem rolls[64]*, especially when my sister was visiting from Vienna. Arif did not (always) believe in religion, which he was fairly open about:

> I never finished the Quran when I was a child. This is not very usual here. I didn't really practise ever, at most I prayed three times a day. I only did it for my mom. After she died, I stopped fasting or going to *jummah*. I couldn't do it anymore. I used to pray sometimes when I really needed help, which actually you're not supposed to do, but I felt so angry when God didn't hear me. Now I try to be different. I don't pray but I say thanks to God in my mind for good things. But I am scared of speaking to God. I feel like I can't take the emotions…I don't pray or fast, nothing. I'm fine with it, I don't feel guilty.

Arif spoke about this relationship to God in terms of the feelings he felt towards Allah. These were intense but did not stop him from continuing his relationship to God. He was angry at God for not hearing him, and now he felt afraid of the emotions that speaking to God would necessarily entail. As he insists, this is not about his guilt for not practising. He chose not to or

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[63] While this is not entirely uncommon in Dhaka, single people living alone is often viewed with suspicion and it can, at times, be difficult to find a landlord who will allow single people to move in. It is more common in expensive neighbourhoods or gated communities, where having a renter from a particular background or with the right income may be more important. Or accepted?

[64] *Phuchka* is a popular street food, made of small, hollow, deep-fried crisp bread. This is filled with a potato-chickpea mash and garnished with grated egg (sometimes) and devoured with tamarind water. These can also be served in yoghurt (*doi*). *Deem roll* is a fried paratha bread filled with egg.

felt like he could not practice, something he did not question, but rather accepted. The feelings he was afraid of were much less definable and appeared to be much more inherent to the relationship between Arif and God.

Something that struck me early on in our conversation was that Arif's feelings took him away from religious practice, yet not from God. In particular, it was the feeling of doubt and needing doubt that oriented him towards God and away from religion. An issue he took with Islam is that he felt doubt is not allowed, yet it was what he needed, what he felt entitled to. He explained: "*Iman* is faith, so if I am Muslim I have to have it. I can't have doubt. This doesn't work for me." Arif believed that doubt is inevitable – everyone has it at some point, somehow. An important part of his relationship to God is the ability to doubt. "I really feel that God was watching out for me, when I really needed help. He gave me second chances. I am really very grateful for this." His relationship to God was made possible through room for doubt, which gave way to forgiveness. Islam, in Arif's view, restricts this potential. It is by moving away from religion that Arif could in fact continue his relationship to God.

What Arif and Azia's stories illustrate are the varying feelings and intentions that centre doubt in their lives, which bring about a non-practice, or even atheism. Azia in particular does not focus overtly on coming to atheism by ways of a process of rationalising away the religious. Rather, it is her experiences of atheism, Islam and other religions, the feelings that came about when she encountered them, that allowed her to orient herself. This is not to say that Azia is now fixed, that her reorientation only occurs in relation to religion. This would not do justice to her rich identities and personality and would illustrate a dangerously narrow conception of individuation as having a fixed outcome.[65] Arif's path is similarly not fixed in time. Their paths towards different religiosities, or away from religion, are not finite but very much part of the on-going process of living and forming themselves. What I have shared here of my interlocutors' stories are glimpses into their current positions and reflections on their religiosities, which are ever changing, reshaping and redirecting them down new paths. The idea of reorientation, to me, is significant here in that it brings up exactly this very potential of the self to be constantly reoriented, compelled not only by rational thought and choice, but also by meaningful feelings and sensations. What I turn to next is the power of space, as an object, to orient individuals like Azia in new directions.

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[65] Venn (2010) expounds on how individuation is a process, a becoming, without a fixed, definite outcome.

The Glass Door: Negotiating Shared Space and Divergent Religiosities

Though Arif and Azia's experiences of not practising, uncertainty, or atheism are personal, they are also political positions and very much created in relation to others. While Islam or religion in general may not be as significant to them as it used to be, religion is still present in their environments, in their relationships with friends and families, in their work lives, offices and leisure spaces. Here I focus on how different Muslim religiosities and atheisms are negotiated through space, feeling, and in relation to others. Chatterjee, Krishnan, and Robb (2017) have made a significant case to think of the feeling body-self as shaped by and shaping the particular space (and time) in which it lives in South Asia. They particularly emphasise city spaces and feelings felt therein as formative of urban environments, and feelings and people as formed by city spaces.[66] This naturally also involves the feelings of others (other people) with whom space is shared. Coupled with Ahmed's (2006) notion of a queer approach to experience, I focus on particular objects in the spaces that my interlocutors inhabit to think about the feelings that they have in space and time, and how these orient them towards different paths and ways of being.

To illustrate this, I begin by thinking about the glass door that partitions Azia's home, which is very much treated as a Faultline. I explore how different ways of being religious or, in her case, atheist, are lived and come to life through this definitive but permeable boundary. I do not suggest that this is exclusively to do with a religious-atheist divide, but that this is part of wider contentions of the liberal-secular and the conservative binary, which I explore further in the final part of this chapter.

Self-forming in relation to space happens within the shared space of home, which, though private, are very much a reflection of religious-secular performances, conflicts and negotiations that happen in public. Both Jamil and Doha (2017) and Raqib (2020), for example, point to the performance of political activism or Islamic and secular-atheist groups in Dhaka's public spaces and streets (and how the state responds to these). I turn to Azia's story here to look into the space of home as shared space, private but still social and connected to the kinds of public performances Raqib, Jamil and Doha describe. But I also turn to her story to illustrate the experiences of a young, upper middle-class woman inhabiting space in Dhaka and the tensions of living and believing differently in the context of home.

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[66] Khan (2015) and Pernau et al. (2015) show how emotional histories of South Asia reveal how emotions are an integral part of cultivating modernity in the colonial setting, but also that emotional histories reveal that the urban and rural aren't emotionally divided in South Asia in the way they are/were in Europe and North America. Somewhat vague.

Azia lived in an apartment in Gulshan, an up-market neighbourhood, with her mother and maids. Their home is connected to an adjacent apartment where her paternal uncle and aunt, cousins and their spouses and children live. The front door to Azia's home leads into an open living space, with wicker chairs and floor cushions arranged around a matching coffee table and oriented towards a spacious shelf with a small TV, books, DVDs and framed family photos. Further ahead is the dining space, a small corner partitioned off by a shelf where Azia's mother likes to read and work, as well as the bedrooms and a corner couch that is often used for sleeping as well as hanging out during the day. Glass cabinets with glassware, crockery, books and figurines – partly for everyday use, others for display or saved for special occasions – line the walls. Next to decorative Islamic calligraphy on the walls, I would often find transitional or perishable artefacts, such as a bunch of one of the smaller banana varieties (*kola*, of which there are many) dangling from the key hanger. I loved walking into this space, I felt like it always had surprises in store. Though when I told Azia this, she looked at me dubiously and said, "You don't have to be English about this."

To the right of the entrance is the glass door that sections off the two apartments. Azia and her mother live on one side, with one bedroom occupied by their maids (*bua, kajer lok*), while her aunt, uncle, cousins, and their kids live on the other. Food and maids move across this threshold everyday, as do the children. One afternoon, towards the end of my stay in Dhaka, I passed by Azia's to say hello. As she often worked on weekends, I knew I would be able to find her at home. Her baby cousin came in on the arm of one of the maids, and Azia promptly scooped him up and allowed him to play with the chandelier dangling over the coffee table. At the same time, aunty (Azia's mother), happy to see me, went not to her own kitchen, but through the glass door to their relatives' part of the home to fetch some tea (*dudcha* – with milk and sugar). While Azia's mother habitually moved easily across this border, Azia did not.

Religion and lifestyle choices are a part of this permeability and simultaneous impermeability. Azia often remarked on the religiosity of her relatives, which she did not agree with, and implied that they are equally uncomfortable with her lifestyle choices. Azia explained, "They don't like how I live, but I don't care. I dress how I want, I come home late, I drink, I smoke. This is my home". She will drink and smoke openly, not minding her mother or other relatives seeing her (through the glass door). In the context of Dhaka, this is no mean feat, even within families where drinking and smoking may be normal. Doing so openly, especially as a junior in the family and particularly as a woman, is not easy. Speaking of their family dynamics, Azia explained, "We hardly speak. They are very religious, and they try and tell others how to live, like they tell my mom too." Here there is a particular tension not so

much between the religious and the secular, in the sense that Azia's issue is not so much the fact that her relatives are religious but the way in which they express their religiosity. The tensions here are more succinctly located in the broader tensions between the liberal and the conservative.

Though Azia experiences friction, at the same time, there is constant movement and exchange across this border presented by the glass door. Moreover, her mother is dedicated to her own religious practice, saying her prayers on time every day and practising Quranic recitations on weekend mornings. Religious and non-religious lifestyles thus cohabit in a way that is not uncommon to middle and upper-class Dhaka households. And while tensions and differences may exist, as they may in any household regardless of religious or non-religious beliefs, coexistence is still taking place. I see the glass door as dividing the spaces of a shared home. But its purpose is not only to separate, but to connect and allow for fluidity also. The glass door allows for heterogeneity and living with difference, even when it seems to be creating essentialising factions on either side of a hard divide. As I described in chapter four, moral negotiation (Robbins 2013) of religious-secular differences is made possible by exploring, rehashing and reconfiguring known binaries, as Hashim Mama does when he declares that religion is culture (see chapter four), or as Rani does when she says she does not believe in djinn, but she feels and experiences them (here the binary is between belief and non-belief, religion and the secular). In Azia's home, religion-secularism, liberal and conservative lifestyles are equally morally negotiated and rehashed through everyday playing, eating and moving across an ostensibly hard divide. Moral negotiation here does not mean convincing others of how to be (virtuous or morally-religiously astute), but more about dealing with one's own differences whilst interacting with the differences of others.

While moral negotiation carries with it a sense of awareness of my interlocutors' differences and responding to these, orientation offers an understanding of how differences take place, shaped by and shaping people and the spaces they inhabit. The glass door, in this sense, further acts as an object around and through which orientation happens. Ahmed (2006) writes of the 'other' as having the potential to affect, to create or bring about feelings which propel people onto alternative paths. Here I see not Azia's relatives, and their religiosities, but rather the door itself as the other. It is a point of orientation, allowing for different modes of being to coexist and intersect while following different trajectories. In other words, the fact of the glass door both maintains tensions, as different kinds of selves are formed on different sides of its border. But it is not as simple as to say that Azia's side is atheist and secular, whereas her relatives occupy a religious front. Her mother, the maids, and the children move across this

ostensible divide, blurring its boundary. The spaces and selves the glass door divides also intimately connects them. The door both maintains tensions while also laying them bare, allowing them to be set aside (as the door opens or remains open) at times while holding them in place during others. The glass door thus has plural ethical potentials, dividing different selves and modes of selving while simultaneously connecting them. The selves and spaces on one side of the door are thus interrelated to the selves and spaces on the other. Their formations and reorientations are thus mediated by the glass door, through which they are invariably divided and enmeshed.

Bodily Techniques: 'Liberal' and 'Conservative' as Identity Categories

The understandings that my interlocutors like Azia and Arif had about their own doubts about religion, as well as their daily habits were very much mediated by the vocabularies of the 'liberal' and the 'conservative'.[67] The categories of the liberal and the conservative were present in the conversations with all my interlocutors, but most firmly came out in my conversations with Azia. "I'm a bit confused about what liberal and conservative mean here," I told Azia on a weekend afternoon at her house. Among Dhaka's (English-speaking) middle- and upper-classes, the categories of liberal and conservative are most frequently used to denote one's own positions and to identify other people's positions also. Often the liberal is synonymous with the secular and the modern, particularly with gender and women (often of the Global South) as objects for whom freedom must be secured and whose 'freedom' becomes a marker of modernity, in this instance meaning progress towards individual freedom (cf. Mahmood 2001, 2005; Abu-Lughod 2013; Huq 2011b; Raqib 2020).

On the other hand, the conservative is understood as religious and 'traditional'. The terms, however, operate on a spectrum, which is very much subjectively understood. Azia asked me to explain, and I gave the example of Zonera, my aunt, who is both very religious but who also understands herself as liberal in terms of dressing how one wants, going to work as a

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[67] In her monograph on cultural memory and the *birangonas* (war heroines) of the 1971 independence struggle in Bangladesh, Nayanika Mookherjee (2015) attends to the manifestations of secular-liberal civil society, particularly in Dhaka. Viewed within ongoing conflicts in the establishment of 'authentic' cultural memory and the position of women and gender norms within the struggle for a 'liberal' society, the secular-liberal agents Mookherjee speaks of are positioned opposite a constructed religious-conservative political grouping. Mookherjee is situating these binary groups within the context of dominant political party dynamics since the 1990s, as well as within local feminist movements of that time. In a recent article on blasphemy, Manosh Chowdhury (2020) similarly sees the construction of a liberal, secular social wing (mostly urban middle-class) pitted against a religiously conservative counterpart as a political binary consciously (and ambiguously) constructed and enforced by dominant political party politics, particularly by the currently reigning Awami League.

woman, smoking, choosing one's partner (if one so wishes), or living independently of a joint family home. Azia responded, "That doesn't work. You can't be religious and liberal." She was not alone in having this opinion and I do not want to single out her atheism solely as a reason for this position. The point is rather that all my interlocutors understood these terms in relation to themselves and their own experiences. Here I focus on the bodily techniques through which the liberal and conservative are performed, imagined, projected and understood. These highlight the complex, non-linear relationship of these terms, as well as the valence they have for my interlocutors.

On the one hand, bodily techniques harken back to the works of Marcel Mauss (1935), who spoke of the body as a product and producer of culture. Drawing on Foucault and Derrida, Butler later argued that the subject is formed and gendered through linguistic and bodily acts that iterate the norms through which they themselves are constituted (Butler 1990, 1999; Shams 2020: 3). While inspired by these works, my attention to the body and what my interlocutors (have to) do with theirs is also due to the way that people speak about others in Bangla to understand what kind of person they are. In the same way that people will ask whether you say prayers to understand in what ways a person is religious, for example, upper middle-class people in Dhaka (as elsewhere) will also take note of things like clothes and how these are worn, as well as whether a person drinks or not to understand what kind of person they are.[68]

I single out the experiences of drinking, as a habit forbidden in Islam, as well as smoking as a contentious bodily technique in Dhaka, particularly for women and especially in public.[69] Smoke and alcohol are literally consumed, taken in by the body and thus have the power to affect un/ethical self-cultivation. As such, smoking and drinking are bodily techniques that are singled out as performances of the liberal, particularly when they relate to women who are an object of much of the debates and categorisations surrounding the liberal and conservative in Dhaka (cf. Raqib 2020). Performativity is the means by which bodies are materialised as gendered (Butler 1995; Blackman 2008: 79). It is also a means by which particular positions and identities, as liberal or conservative, can be expressed and/or understood. More than seeing drinking and smoking as a form of liberal resistance (cf. Mahmood 2001; Braidotti 2002) to the conservative, I rather see it here as a multifaceted performance which highlights the imbrication of the liberal and the conservative in multiple discourses. In this sentence it could be a resistance, but in so doing it also maintains the other.

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[68] I have often been asked in Europe by other Muslims that I met for the first time whether I drink.

[69] Here I refer to smoking cigarettes primarily, but also *ganja* (cannabis), a common social habit in Dhaka amongst younger people primarily and found in the middle- and upper-classes particularly.

I show here how continuing to see the liberal and conservative as discrete is necessary in order to be able to live differently and articulate difference, particularly along the lines of differing religiosities in Dhaka.

In Azia's story, she marked drinking and smoking as a habitual part of her life. To her, this is an important part of living liberally, particularly as a woman. She participated in both openly at home and elsewhere – one of the main differences in lifestyle between her and her relatives. I myself was told by my relatives that I can smoke at home, but that I should not do this outside. While I read this as concern, Azia disagreed and saw it as a normative means of control/conformity of women's bodies masked as care.

Strangely enough, I found myself in a similar conundrum. A friend came to visit me from the Philippines and had only brought, particularly for Dhaka, upper middle-class standards, very revealing clothes, which is extremely difficult to pull off in Dhaka without harassment if one wants to move in public spaces. Azia and I had a long discussion about this, as I found myself unsure if I should 'protect' my friend by giving her clothes/shawls to cover up more so we can move in public and with public transport, or to let her dress as she wishes, move in private transport, and then shout at anyone who tries to molest her when we are on the street. I wondered if I was protecting her from judgement, did she need this 'protection', and was I complicit in the social control of women's bodies. I reasoned that it is very different for a foreigner (like myself and my friend) to challenge local ethics and norms, than for somebody from Dhaka, like Azia. But Azia was slightly, and justifiably, furious, arguing, "Let her dress how she wants! People should deal with it. It's not her problem."

Azia, like myself, had the 'privilege' to be able to live her life this way, marked by smoking and drinking, dressing as she pleases, not getting married, staying out as long as she wants (as did I). Dressing here particularly means wearing Western clothes like skirts and dresses and not wearing an *orna* (shawl draped over the chest by women). The *orna* in particular is a point of contention, particularly in shared spaces like offices, where this is often insisted on. All these factors are related to class and gender, as women of other classes would find it significantly more difficult to be able to live their lives this way without severely debilitating social repercussions. For Azia too, her lifestyle still comes with a barrage of frictions and also a need for access to certain spaces, such as expat clubs or bars, activist spaces, or her own home.

Rafiq, a young, Bangla-medium educated development professional in his 40s, whom I became friends with through Azia midway through my time in Dhaka, also spoke of smoking

and drinking as markers of the liberal and the conservative, very much mediated by gender. He explained:

> If you are a man, whether conservative or liberal, you can smoke whenever, wherever, and as much as you want. At least in public. The family and especially when arranging a marriage to a wife and one's in-laws, guys won't necessarily say they smoke cigarettes, though this isn't as bad as *ganja*, that's more difficult to talk about. Because you don't know how they will feel about this. But smoking is very gendered. How people think about a woman smoking, if they judge them, say for example if someone won't talk to or won't date a woman because she smokes – this can determine if they are liberal or conservative. To be honest, I don't need people like that in my life.

This is not to say that all people who identify as conservative will judge women who smoke, nor that all liberal people in Dhaka will not judge. Rather, Rafiq's thoughts imply that women are a particular object of debate when it comes to understandings of liberal or conservative identities in Dhaka. The fact that he judges people who judge smoking women similarly shows how judgement and the person judging are objectified in the everyday and become subject to similar scrutiny. This is integral to the everyday workings of the terms liberal and conservative.

Compared to smoking, the stakes are somewhat different when it comes to drinking. "With alcohol it's different – nobody should be drinking, because of religion [Islam]. So this isn't a gender issue. Lots of people are religious, and they'll say drinking is bad, but they'll still do it." Rafiq himself liked to drink but he was not concerned about whether it was permissible or not. As I explored in the previous chapter, Saif and Hashim Mama both enjoy drinking outside of Ramadan. Both are devout Muslims and drinking is an important part of their lifestyles. Like Rafiq, neither were particularly bothered about whether it is allowed or not, but enjoyed it as a part of their everyday.

In the context of what constitutes the liberal in Dhaka, I argue that drinking as a bodily practice is a means to cultivate a certain kind of privileged self among my interlocutors, like Azia, Saif and Hashim Mama. Speaking of elite women in Bangladesh, Nazia Hussein (2017, 2018) shows how women are positioned and position themselves as the epitome of modern, local feminine selves through their hybrid (Western and local) dress (a bodily performance). The self I speak of is similarly marked by the ethics of a particularly privileged lifestyle where drinking is central to socialising. Saif Mama, for instance, enjoyed smoking cigars and whiskey, both imported from abroad. I do not suggest that alcohol and cigarettes themselves

are foreign objects consumed by a local person. Rather, the cigarettes and alcohol they specifically are consuming on a daily basis are sourced from abroad. In other words, Azia, Saif and Hashim Mama are not smoking *biri* (local cigarettes) or *keru* or *tari* (local alcohol variations), which are cheap and easily available. They have access to the upmarket alcohol depots (technically only reserved for people with foreign passports) or through local alcohol dealers who do home deliveries. Jamal (2022) notes how drinking 'correctly' is part of socialising among elite development workers in Dhaka. Particularly those workers from non-social elite backgrounds find themselves having to contend with certain kinds of drinking practices that are dominated and dictated by workers from social and economically elite backgrounds. How and what one drinks in Dhaka is thus very much an expression of privilege.

At the same time, for my interlocutors, the daily drinking of alcohol is not in itself or necessarily about distancing oneself from religion or God. This is certainly not the case for Hashim and Saif Mama. On the one hand, it is very much about having fun (cf. Schielke 2001; Bayat 2013; Deeb & Harb 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). This type of fun, however, involves a self that seeks to be separated from the ostensibly conservative, which in itself is seen as a particular ethical position, even if complex, diffracted, and very much entangled with the liberal. For Azia in particular, drinking is both a possibility and a choice offered by class access, but it is also a part of enjoying life outside of the bounds of heteronormative, gendered trajectories, in which a woman may be expected to live and behave in certain ways. To Azia, the latter is very much associated with the 'conservative'.

The formation of selves is of course not separate from the project of forming society differently or otherwise. Thus, when Azia, Hashim Mama or Saif Mama would drink and smoke, they were not only doing something for themselves – their actions and selving are part of and formative of the spaces they inhabit and the society in which they live.[70] In a discussion of subjectivation within the Egyptian mosque movement, Paul Anderson (2011) contends that the ethical self-formation both Mahmood (2005) and Hirschkind (2006) refer to, produced through bodily performances of prayer and rituals, hearing sermons and reciting the Qur'an, is also a means of creating an ethical community. The self is thus not isolated from the social. Rather, through forming the self, the wider community is ethically produced as well. To Anderson's mind, the piety that is achieved within the self is extended as an achievement of a non-secular sociality more broadly (ibid.: 4). "Moving 'closer to God' also [secures] the

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[70] This is precisely also why many can and will also take issue with their behaviour, in the same way that Azia and Hashim Mama disapprove of the messages told during *khutbah*.

coherence and closeness of the community." (ibid. 13). In the context of Dhaka, drinking and smoking are not necessarily about moving towards or away from God. I do, however, see it as a means of self-forming that is enacted by the body-self and which extends towards society. The liberal and conservative are categories through which the self and society are formed and performed among Dhaka's upper middle-classes.

Rather than see smoking and drinking exclusively as a form of resistance towards the conservative or religion, as it is understood by my interlocutors, I here take it as an expression of the dialectical relationship between the two. To this effect, they are very much self-enforcing. I do not wish to detract from the fact that drinking and smoking can also just be seen as a source of leisure, killing time (*shomoy katta*), and joy (cf. Schielke 2008, 2009; Deeb & Harb 2013). Especially when following a phenomenological approach and the emphasis on feeling which I have so far placed, not considering the feelings around smoking and drinking is problematic to say the least. However, what I emphasise here is the importance of the categories of liberal and conservative in organising, identifying and valuing people in Dhaka. My interlocutors' stories speak of how much of life and identity in Dhaka today is (mis)understood and (mis)judged according to the categories of the liberal and the conservative.

It is also in this context of the liberal and conservative, understood here as a distinctive discourse of Dhaka's upper middle-class, that the notion of plural orientations and negotiating difference becomes important. The glass door in Azia's home both implies how the religious-secular, liberal and conservative are understood as separate, but also how these categories are lived together, simultaneously, heterogeneously and hybridly. By being oriented and orienting themselves in plural ways and, paradoxically, keeping the hard boundary fluid, Azia is able to exist in these set categories, 'believing' and valuing them, whilst also finding her own way through them.

Managing and Affirming Difference: 'Liberal' and 'Conservative' in the Office Space
In Dhaka, liberal and conservative as adjectives are not only used to describe people, others and selves, but can also apply to the spaces they inhabit. What is happening in a space, how, and who is the subject of the doing are important indicators which end up having a defining value for spaces. This is not to say that spaces are classified exclusively as 'liberal' or 'conservative'. As Azia's home shows, multiple agencies are part and parcel of particular spaces.

Where, how and for whom drinking and smoking can happen is an example of how spaces become ethically defined. Azia used to spend much of her leisure time in Gulshan's various expat clubs, remnants and revivals of a colonial presence (which she is very well aware of). Here one can drink, smoke, sunbathe and stay out late regardless of one's gender, but very much dependent on class and social capital.[71] As Azia put it, "what else am I going to do here?" By "here", Azia was referring to Dhaka. I heard this often from my interlocutors, as upper middle-class people often complain that there is nothing to do in Dhaka. The expat clubs were a way for Azia to spend time outside, in the open or on public ground, while enjoying alcohol and spending time with friends. But these clubs are not exclusively the space for people who feel or are identified as liberal. Expat clubs are very much about access, privilege, money and business – qualities not exclusive to people who are understood as liberal. Speaking of upper-class homes and spaces in New Delhi, Kuldova (2017) makes a case for luxury utopias or "luxotopias" – pockets of acute privilege that are separated from and simultaneously rely on the poor slums surrounding them (cf. Prakash 2011; Akhter 2017). Expat clubs can very well be understood as part of the wider complex of "luxotopias", here also compounded by their proximity to the foreign, particularly to Europe and North America.

Because of the exclusivity of their accessibility, however, expat clubs are not available to all, even of the upper middle-classes. For the purpose of the argument here, I do not want to limit the debates around liberal and conservative to such a small, bounded space. Rather, here I take up office spaces as sites where the liberal and conservative as categories are made and reproduced. I argue that this occurs in particular with relation to religion and the secular. They are not merely ways of understanding certain dynamics and tensions between the religious and the secular that are taking place in these shared spaces, but are also very constitutive of these dynamics. In other words, the liberal and conservative do not just describe particular conditions and relations, but reinforce them. They are a way of managing and affirming differences. It is also in this sense that Bhabha's (1994) idea of hybridity, as the composing of different discrete things and identities coming together, is meaningful. It is precisely the fact that different parts of people's identities can be separated that allows different kinds of potentials to be found in their interstices. In a similar vein, the liberal and conservative, in the narratives of my interlocutors, are interwoven, yet discrete. I see the same dynamic in Latour's (1992) understanding of the secular and religion as discrete, yet also deeply imbricated and hybrid. In

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[71] Having a means of private transportation, which is very expensive, or at least somebody to drop you off at home is important for many women.

the case of the office space, I show how this separating and converging of the liberal-conservative, religious-secular, occurs through intersubjective negotiations of religion, inter-class and other power dynamics particular to the office environment, and specific ideologies of progress.

The office is where people of plural middle and upper middle-class backgrounds, religions and religiosities come together. The heterogeneity of the employees and the intentions and dispositions of the employers creates a space where many different ways of being come together outside of the home. Simultaneously, the office is also part of global capitalist dynamics and understands of professionalism, space, politics and employment practices. For example, many start-ups in Gulshan, Banani and Uttara offer their employees new Apple Macbooks both to do their work, but also as a marker of global start up culture, where offering expensive equipment is a means to secure the 'right' staff. Moreover, as I show here, the office has taken on the role not only as a place of employment, but where national politics and aspirations are manifested.

Arif was working as a senior manager at a company, a European franchise, around Tejgaon, an industrial area close to Gulshan. He described his experience of not fasting during Ramadan:

> During Ramadan, I would go to the canteen and have my lunch. I would have water and tea in my office too. I really don't care. But my colleagues or other people in the company would come and look, ask me how come I am not fasting. I told them I didn't feel like it. Some would get used to it, I was working there for very long.

Fasting and observing religious practice was the norm in his office and condoned by the owners. As a man identified as Muslim, he was expected, by his colleagues, to fast as well. As I discussed in chapter four, many in Dhaka, like Hashim or Saif Mama, who do not practise Islam regularly or consistently, who drink and smoke outside of Ramadan, will fast diligently during the month of fasting. Arif drank both during and outside of Ramadan. The office was a site where his religiosity and lack of practice were subject to discussion. Within an office environment, Arif was understood as occupying a liberal position, here understood as secular, in that he was not practising.

Zonera, whom I introduced in chapter four, was also working in an office as a senior manager. "Usually, I'll say my prayers in my chair in my office, I don't go out anywhere or

with others. One of the guys working for me joked with me. He said, '*Apu*, you're semi-IS'."[72] She enjoyed the joke and explained this was their way of talking about her religiosity. The office space can thus be a place where different religiosities meet and are commented on, if not contested, as in Arif's case. The personal is very much political, in that it is social and part of the spaces people inhabit. For Zonera's colleague, 'semi-IS' meant she was a practising Muslim, saying her prayers at work, but the irony and humour was also made possible because she said her prayers in her chair and not in a prayer room, neither does she engage others on how religious or not they are. Here I see the workings of the liberal and conservative, where different kinds of religiosity meet, are measured, sized up and categorised to various degrees. Looking at the ways 'secular and pious' Muslims in Belgium pray at work, Fadil (2013) speaks of a negotiation of public space. I too see a similar negotiation at play, however, I would not divide my interlocutors into secular or pious. As opposed to being 'fully IS', Zonera is only partly so in that she practises diligently and openly within the shared space of the office, but still sufficiently private and without interfering with her work (I come to this point again later).

How religion is practised in the office space is also connected to what is allowed, permissible and condoned; this is very much defined by local company owners. While staff generally performed their fast and were able to pray during prayer times or have days off for religious periods if they were non-Muslim, Arif's bosses also capitalised on his non-practice. Whenever colleagues or business partners from abroad would come to Dhaka, Arif would be asked to take them out to drink and to eat, particularly during Ramadan. While Arif's non-practice and 'liberal' habit of drinking was not the norm and seemingly remarkable in the office space, it also became part of his job. "It's fine for me, I don't mind. But you see how things work," he remarked.

This is not to suggest that the 'liberal', as it is understood in Dhaka, is simply exploited by 'conservative' parties in the name of economic interest. The 'liberal' similarly capitalises on itself and its relation to the conservative. Isa spoke of a similar yet converse experience during Ramadan. He used to work at an NGO in Gulshan before moving back to the UK for his studies. I told him about Arif's experience of not fasting during Ramadan at work. He responded, "I think I have a counterpoint. When I was working in Dhaka, we had a canteen where everyone would go eat. During Ramadan, the canteen would sell less food – you know, to cater to people of other religions who weren't fasting. But what was available was more

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[72] *Apu* or *Apa* means sister, used to respectfully address a woman senior to oneself. IS here refers to the paramilitary group Islamic State (also called *Daesh* in Arabic).

expensive and the quality was better. You see what I mean?" Isa was implying that the company was catering to upper-class people who could afford more expensive food and who were assumed, almost by default, not to fast. The liberal then, in this instance, is understood as the absence of religious practice and only available to people who could afford it. The underlying assumption is that people of a particular background and with a certain income will not practise Islam, at least not in public.

Both Isa and Arif's stories highlight how particular understandings of the liberal and the conservative are propagated through notions of class and the workings of capitalism[73]. In both instances, the company owners themselves seem to occupy a particular position in laying the ground for how the liberal and conservative, here mediated through the idea and space for religion, will be lived in the office space. Company owners are both individuals with a background in the upper-class or elite entrepreneurs from middle-class backgrounds who were running successful businesses. Rani similarly spoke of her boss sanctioning religious habits at their office in Gulshan. Though things like a prayer space, Eid pay and holidays, and earlier closing times during Ramadan were observed, as is standard across offices, the owner disapproved of religious observance during office time. "His argument is how can Bangladesh develop economically if everyone is praying all the time or finishing work early because of fasting." These kinds of arguments are common among business owners in Dhaka. Couched in a defence of the interests of the nation, they are particularly difficult to argue against, despite having strictly secular overtones. The underlying assumption, however, is that the path to economic development is only achievable through liberal, here understood as secular, means. The secular here is important as the point is precisely not for people to stop being religious, but to put their religiosity aside, leave it at home, not bringing it into the (liberal) space of work.

Hassan Nana[74], who ran his own company for many years before retiring, was also very devoted to the idea of the economic progress of Bangladesh, though his vision of how this would occur was markedly different from Rafiq's boss's idea. He is an old family friend whom I became close to within my first months in Dhaka and he was the first person I interviewed

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[73] I consciously use the term 'capitalism' rather than neoliberalism here, as the term carries some unwanted baggage. Tejaswini Ganti (2014) lays bare the contentions of using neoliberalism as an analytical term within anthropology. Neoliberalism is too often used synonymously with capitalism and as a placeholder to connect multiple phenomena, much like the term 'globalisation' is used (ibid.: 98-99). A genealogical understanding of the term highlights a prescriptive relationship between markets and the state, where the former is considered to better grasp and convey information concerning supply and demand. The state must not be erased, but rather take on particular functions in relation to the market (ibid..: 92). Though formulated in economic terms, it relates to a totalising economic and social system, whereby a "good society is not 'natural,' but instead can only come about through a concerted political effort." (ibid.).

[74] Maternal grandfather.

formally. Like with Hashim Mama, I asked him if we could speak in Bangla so I could practise. The familial relationship we shared gave me the space and comfort to speak. His story is very much imbricated with his religiosity and the history of religious communalism in South Asia. Hassan Nana was a devout Muslim who practiced diligently and daily, firmly believing in God. Growing up in West Bengal, he came to Dhaka in the 1970s:[75]

> I originally came from Calcutta. I came here when I was young to work. Do you know the Dhaka-Chittagong highway? I did the survey work for this, I spent months travelling around the country…Then slowly, I built my own business...I am first and foremost a Bangladeshi. Bangladesh and God, both gave me the opportunities to succeed, to have a successful business, to take care of my family. For this I am very grateful. So I try to give back as much as I can.

For Hassan Nana, giving back was also part of his business model. "I make sure I employ people of all religious backgrounds, make sure they get treated fairly and can progress equally. And this is convenient for me too. During Eid, I still have a driver [who is Christian] so I can go visit my family around the city." To Hassan Nana, having a successful business and driving the economy of the country did not require excising religion from the workplace. Rather, his own religiosity was very much part of how he managed his business and supported the progression of others.[76] Moreover, his approach to employing and supporting employees of all religions, whilst informed by his faith, speaks to twentieth-century secularisms in South Asia which, broadly speaking, centred religious pluralism (Sheikh 2015), and which have now transformed into a politics of belonging (Nair 2023).[77]

This section took as its object the interplay of different religiosities in the workplace, like Zonera and Arif with their respective colleagues and bosses. These show how the liberal

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[75] He would not say this explicitly, but starting a successful business, finding the capital, or being promoted was significantly more difficult in Calcutta as a Muslim. There were also numerous outbursts of unrest in both East Pakistan/Bangladesh, as well as Calcutta throughout the 20th century post-partition, driving Muslim communities to Dhaka and Hindus to Calcutta. What he also did not say is that being identified in Bangladesh as non-Bengali, in other words, having migrated from different parts of South Asia to Bangladesh as a Muslim, can leave you open to much judgement, if not outright harassment.

[76] Jamal (2022) has made a compelling case for the (elite) development industry in Dhaka to be very much about making certain kinds of individuals that can fit a business-driven model of development. Progress is deemed to be possible through the cultivation of certain kinds of people with the right skillset that fit the demands of the private sector. Hassan Nana is similarly supporting his employees to excel within the private sector environment.

[77] Here a case could be made for Hassan Nana's narrative speaking to a post-secular future of Bangladesh/South Asia, where the hybrid workings of religion-secularism are embraced, something I intend to explore elsewhere.

and the conservative are terms through which different religiosities can be understood, negotiated, and contested within the shared space of the office. While the liberal and conservative function as discrete categories, they also overlap. Hence Zonera can be 'semi-IS'. Furthermore, Isa and Rafiq's experiences reveal how the liberal is also equated with the secular in the office space, presuming and enforcing a class-based notion of religion as irrelevant to the work environment. Here, the liberal and the conservative work as absolute categories, couched within the moral framework posed by a progress-oriented economic development discourse that is understood as essentially secular. Hassan Nana, then, shows how progress and economic development are integral, yet not absolutely within the domain of the liberal and secular. As Rudnyckyj (2010) argues, Islam can very much be integral to personal growth and business practice in the contemporary global capitalist economy. Hassan Nana's story in particular complicates the notion of the secular as exclusively liberal. To say that the liberal and the conservative are plural, hybrid categories to me seems problematic, in the sense that it does not do justice to those people, such as Azia or Rafiq's boss, for whom they very much are discrete. Rather, what the stories in this section reveal is that the liberal and the conservative are organising principles used to make sense of a complex array of identities, subjectivities, religiosities and differences in Dhaka today. The professional office space provides a unique environment where different subjects meet and interrogate each other, religion and the secular, the liberal and conservative, economic development and the nation in complex ways. In this sense, liberal does not have one single meaning, neither does the conservative. They are, however, always to be understood together and provide a heuristic device by which to understand and affirm differences in the everyday of my interlocutors.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I sought to bring into conversations processes of religious-secular self-making with inter-subjective experiences of and recreation of difference, particularly along the religious-secular divide. I began with a discussion of how feelings can be vehicles for reorientations away from religion or towards other kinds of religiosities. Using Sara Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenological approach, my aim was to show how it is not always or only about rational conclusions, but feelings that propel my interlocutors, like Azia and Arif towards different directions. This brings intentionality and feeling together to describe the tangible ways in which feelings affect difference and changes of heart. This, to me, is important to understand how different modes of religiosity in Dhaka and among my interlocutors take shape in non-linear ways, and very much on a continuous basis. Moving beyond moral negotiation, which I

saw very much as a process of negotiating differences in moral values, I attempted here to show how difference comes about and what kinds of differences my middle- and upper-class interlocutors are dealing with today in Dhaka.

I then explored how the particular spaces my interlocutors choose to inhabit very much have the potential to create the feelings and provide the room to explore new religious orientations. These can be simultaneously public and private in that they are shared spaces, like Azia's home. I drew attention to particular objects like the glass door to articulate how difference is lived and experienced in the context of shared spaces, where multiple agencies, identities and religiosities meet.

As much as individuals may be able to orient themselves differently, this still happens in relation to others, as Azia and Asif's stories show. My focus on the categories of the liberal and the conservative intended to shed light on one of the main heuristic devices through which, I felt, my interlocutors most often made sense of religious-secular difference in Dhaka. I began by showing how it is very much to do with bodily techniques, sartorial practises, but particularly drinking and smoking. These in turn are mediated by class and gendered discourses. In my view, drinking and smoking subjects are not automatically liberal and secular, and people who do not smoke or drink are not automatically conservative. But to many of my interlocutors, smoking and drinking are the performance of a liberal position, juxtaposed against a conservative one. To them, it is necessary to conceive of the liberal and conservative as separate in order to allow for difference, even if this is at the expense of creating essentialising categories, which themselves have varying, situationally defined meanings.

I end with Hassan Nana's story in that it brings together various constellations of the liberal and the conservative within the office and business environment of Dhaka. In this section I equated the liberal, as it is lived and understood among my interlocutors, with the secular. He considers himself conservative, and I do not wish to diminish this self-understanding. But understood in relation to religion and the secular, Hassan Nana's position reveals that the liberal and conservative, are not actually best represented as polar opposites on a scale. The secular here has been understood as a marginalising force towards religion, though they both hold each other quite firmly in place. At the same time, Hassan Nana's approach to business may well be understood as secular in the context of South Asia, where the secular can also be understood as an ideal of plural religions coexisting rather than religion disappearing from public space and life entirely (cf. Jahanbegloo 2011; Van Beek 2012). Yet here too the secular can function to entrench religious differences (Mahmood 2015), as different religions

are categorically understood as separate in Hassan Nana's business model. In other words, religious difference still matters, even if people are being treated more equally.[78]

The discourse on the liberal and the conservative that I have elaborated here is both unique to the context of Dhaka and my interlocutors, but it is closely related to wider global discourses which use these terms to articulate difference. The following chapter takes the travel stories of my interlocutors to show how travelling, experiencing other places, and coming home change and shape their religiosities in Dhaka in plural ways. The next chapter focuses on how being elsewhere also brings my interlocutors new possibilities for reorientations and new ways of dealing with difference and being otherwise in Dhaka.

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[78] As I described in chapter two, mixing of religious communities, particularly in terms of inter-marriage, occurs but it is not an easy feat and usually is met with some form of tension and resistance from family members and others. Class and the liberal can provide room for inter-faith love, but this is also not a given. Veena Das (2010) has written eloquently of an inter-faith love marriage in Delhi and the everyday ethical concerns this raised for her interlocutors.

Chapter 6: Experiencing the World

"My mother was responsible for the religious and cultural inputs in the children's [our] lives. She considered herself to be from a conservative family. As such we were taught regularly on the teachings and practices of Islam. There was a period in East Pakistan where we had Moulavis (teachers of Quran). They taught us how to read the Quran. From their attitude, I don't think I received any benefits. Instead, their effort to teach us about Islam was counterproductive. In the United States we were taught very little on religion. However, when we moved to Saudi Arabia, we had separate teachers for the Quran, religion and Arabic. The teachers were very knowledgeable and from around the globe. Many of them were from universities such as Harvard and were in Saudi Arabia to collect data for their dissertations. There were Egyptians, Pakistanis, Indians, Lebanese, Syrians, Palestinians, etc. All the teachers influenced us in some way or another, but the Egyptians were the best. They taught us not only about Islamic rituals in general but also the essence of Islam."

I begin this chapter with Samia Khala, a middle-aged acquaintance of mine who described herself as a "liberal Muslim". The class-specific vocabulary of the liberal and conservative, that I explored in chapter five, here finds resonance in my interlocutors' stories of travelling and experiencing the world. Samia Khala was living in Dhaka when we met, but had spent much of her life living across several continents. In her youth, this was in part due to her father's career, but also due to her parents' wish for the 'right' kind of religious, Islamic education for her and her siblings. Living in Dhaka today, Samia Khala's life story is testament to the fact that Dhaka is not an isolated place. Stories and experiences travel inside and outside of Dhaka, enmeshing it in a more complex whole that is the world. Religious experiences that were lived elsewhere are also taken into the city, such as experiences of Hajj[79] or meeting a *pir* in India, and those that are experienced in Dhaka travel with their bearers to other parts of the world (cf. Osella & Osella 2008). In this chapter, I focus on my interlocutors' travels and experiences abroad and how these affect their experiences and practice of Islam and their sense of the world. More specifically, this chapter deals with how the apparent friction between the universal and the particular are lived and explored by my interlocutors in Dhaka today through their experiences as upper middle-class Muslims (cf. Sloane-White 2017). Drawing again on Sara

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[79] A Muslim pilgrimage performed every year, by members of all schools of Islam, during the twelfth and final month of the Islamic calendar, *Dhu al-Hijjah*.

Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenology, I engage the plural identities of my interlocutors, like Samia Khala, as upper middle-class persons, from Bangladesh and Dhaka, with their own religious becomings, while also being part of a global Muslim community (the *ummah).*

This chapter deals with my interlocutors' sense of being in the world. I take this quite literally by thinking of world as place, hence why I begin this chapter with Samia Khala's story, which speaks of places and the connections made there. Yet Samia Khala's and my other interlocutors' senses of being part of a global Muslim community are equally *part* of how their sense of the world is shaped. The Muslim *ummah* carries connotations of transnationalism, abrogated borders and global connection. The idea of Islam treated as a global phenomenon is very much tied up with notions of Islam as divided into great and little traditions (cf. Redfield 1955). On the one hand, the so-called great traditions refer to orthodox Islam whilst little traditions ostensibly refer to non-orthodox practice, creating a division of Muslims into different kinds of believers that can be categorised and understood on these terms (much like my interlocutors use terms like liberal and conservative) (cf. Asad 2009: 8). At the same time, great and little traditions also refer to Islam respectively as an institution and a set of definable doctrines and shared customs, whereas little traditions have been understood as local expressions of Islam (cf. Schielke & Debevec 2012). Within the anthropology of Islam in Europe, Fadil (2019) notes a particular representation of Muslims, coming out of Asad's approach to Islam as a discursive tradition, as holding multiple citizenships - that of the places/cultures/states they inhabit in Europe and their distinctly 'Muslim' citizenship, which in turn requires state regulation (cf. Salvatore 2004: 1029). The transnationalism widely construed as part of the Islamic public (Bowen 2004; Tarlo 2010), the *ummah* and of Islamic culture (Rizvi 2015) implies that Muslims have plural citizenship and identity, while still being part of a global community.

The way that Fadil speaks of an anthropology of Islam in *Europe*, and the way anthropologists in particular have been writing about Muslim people in very localised ways (as is the habit of anthropology), speaks to this place-focused understanding of Islam as a religion and of Muslims as plural subjects. This in itself is not new. The question is how (if at all) place is important to how Muslim people think and feel about the world and their place in it. Here I follow the tales of travel of my interlocutors to talk about the connections between the places they dwell in and their experiences as Muslim, Bangali, South Asian, Bangladeshi and classed subjects. I turn to the idea of world in order to explore what it means for my interlocutors to be globally and locally emplaced, to be both privileged and under privileged in the global scheme of things, to be Muslim as Bangladeshis/Bangalis/South Asians, as well as part of a global

community. In short, if we are going to think about Islam and Muslims as a transnational discourse and globally shared identity, it behooves us to consider what the world is at all. Here I draw on multiple experiences of the world, understood in terms of place, though all enmeshed in and indivisible from class experiences.

For the purpose of this chapter, I follow an idea of world as undivided rather than following the multiple worlds thesis, which considers different cultural communities to not hold different understandings of one reality, but to occupy different realities all together (Viveiros de Castro 1998; Henare, Holbraad & Wastell 2007; de la Cadena 2010).[80] The problem with this perspective is, as Nadasdy (2021) writes, that it requires a flattened ethnography, as heterogeneity cannot be supported. In a similar vein, my approach here is not to suppose a certain kind of Muslim Bangladeshi ontology or perspective of a different world entirely. Rather, my aim is to show how my interlocutors' experiences of the world attest to their plural identities and experiences as upper middle-class Muslims from Dhaka, moving around the world, out of and back to Dhaka.

Here I return to Ahmed's (2008) queer phenomenology to show how encounters with different objects, spaces and places of the world provide my interlocutors with an impetus for new orientations and new ways of dealing with class, religious and ethno-national difference (their own and others'). Orientations are brought about by feelings brought about by encounters with objects and spaces. In the stories I share here, these objects and spaces refer to those my interlocutors encountered while abroad, and how they felt, thought, believed and practised (or not) when they returned to Dhaka. This includes sites like the *Kaaba*[81] or encounters with known Islamic scriptures but in different contexts, outside of Dhaka. Like religious experiences, these (re)orientations are both very social and deeply personal. They also provide a possibility for and a sense of divine intervention. As I show here, my interlocutors do not necessarily ascribe divine intervention to their experiences, but making this possibility analytically available is, to me, an important step. In other words, queer phenomenology applied to my ethnography allows me to make place for Godly intention as a possible reason for the feelings my interlocutors feel or have felt in the important life moments that they shared with me. Much of this thesis focuses on the so-called 'everyday' experiences of my

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[80] I do not necessarily always hold the one-world stance in this debate. Truth be told, I waver between sides frequently. Here I felt it made more sense to talk about one world in order to be able to think of categories like upper middle-class and Muslim across a global spectrum. Even if these are very contextually defined, I here wanted to stress their continuity and global connection.

[81] A black, cube edifice at the centre of the Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

interlocutors, but the aim is not to erase Islamic or religious interpretations of what is going on (cf. Fadil & Fernando 2015a, 2015b).

I begin with Samia Khala's story to show how class formation involves very particular experiences of the world. Here class access to the world is bound up with the way she has believed and practised as a Muslim throughout her life. I then turn to Hashim Mama to explore how his sense of spirituality changed not only through travelling away, but by returning home, and encountering others from different places throughout his life. Going away became a means to understand better what spirituality was to him and where in the world it could be found. Zara Mami's story similarly tells of her reorientation of her religious practice and dress by moving abroad and coming home. In her story, the answer to her question of why she dresses and practises differently in different places is unknown to her. I dwell on this not-knowing as itself a source for potentially understanding reorientations better as both a social and very 'individualistic' thing. I end with a discussion of Zonera and Naveed's experiences of the Hajj, both while in Saudi Arabia, as well as before and after in Dhaka. Their narratives highlight experiences that are meant to bring Muslims, in particular, together as part of a global community, creating and upholding connections and friction, while also providing space for deeply personal relations to the world and Islam to unfold.

Class Experiences and Access to the World

Samia Khala's story, with which I opened this chapter, is telling of class experiences as worlding, while both class and world are connected to senses and memories of place. The places she mentioned where she had lived (East Pakistan, the US, Saudi Arabia), as well as the nationalities of the people who were responsible for her religious education as a child and adolescent, speak to her sense of the world as a series of places and social-historical contexts. Moreover, they here became a kind of rubric for her to make sense of the trajectory of her religious education. This struck me not because it was entirely unique compared to my other interlocutors' stories (though it was), but rather because growing up as part of a diasporic middle-class Bangladeshi family and educated at international schools, I was used to thinking of transnational education as good and desirable. In other words, Samia Khala's way of speaking about her religious education and the people connected to it was very familiar.

Samia Khala was a friend of my older cousin whom I met at an event organised by my niece at her home in Gulshan in northern Dhaka. We spoke in English, as my Bangla was still quite broken at the time, and also because most people were speaking in English at the party anyway. Though she was my cousin's friend, I still referred to her as *Khala* due to the

substantial age difference between us (me at twenty-six, her in her fifties). As an elder, she naturally started asking me questions about my studies and then my research (Samia Khala, like most people, initially assumed that I was a high school student). I explained that I was researching religious experiences among upper middle-class people in Dhaka, and she immediately engaged me in a debate about what this meant. Over the dinner table, we continued our conversation. She was very lively and animated throughout, picking up on what she perceived to be contradictions and issues of debate regarding how to be 'correctly' religious and what these questions signified among different social groups in Dhaka. Eventually she started speaking about her father, who had been employed at international organisations in the mid to late twentieth century, during the East Pakistan and early Bangladesh eras. It was in Saudi Arabia, where he relocated the family for their religious education, where she learned "the essence of Islam". Samia Khala never fully explained what she meant by the essence of Islam, but it was clear that she felt she had understood or gained something profound and meaningful about Islam through her education in Saudi Arabia.

Along with her parents and her siblings, Samia Khala grew up in multiple countries across multiple continents. Her Americanised English, with which she wrote and spoke to me, was telling of her time in the US and at international schools. Having been educated at international schools myself, I was well aware of the 'signs' of such an educational environment, as well of how others in Dhaka perceive them, sometimes as prestige, but often with caution due to the privileges they imply. While Samia Khala's family's class and employment background allowed her a particular kind of privileged experience, it was her father's growing wish for a particular kind of religious education and experience that proved most formative for Samia Khala. She readily agreed to be interviewed and we exchanged emails after the first, and last, time we met in person. For various reasons, Samia Khala and I ended up conducting our interviews as a series of e-mail exchanges. I am not sure if this was due to being busy, health or social concerns, but either way, it was an experience that is unique to my research in Dhaka. To this day, I have only met her once and we continue our disembodied exchanges.

Samia Khala's narrative of her religious education is both unique and personal, while also indicative of the formation of an upper-class subject that is able to experience the world from a particular (privileged) vantage point. In Dhaka, her religious education was mostly conducted by her mother and partly by *moulavis* (religious instructors). She was sceptical of

the latter, explaining, that she felt their efforts at educating her were "counterproductive".[82] Most significantly, her sense of a good religious education became more apparent in her descriptions of the religious teaching she received abroad.

It was in Saudi Arabia where Samia Khala received what became to her the most meaningful religious education. This religious education is significantly different from the kind that any of my other interlocutors would have received. On the one hand, she was educated by a range of international students and scholars from global, elite universities, through whom she felt that she was able to learn "the essence of Islam". This is in stark contrast to the way she describes her formal religious education in Dhaka. Samia Khala's parents deliberately moved her family to Saudi Arabia for a religious education that they found would be fitting. The place and environment offered was thus fundamental to nurture a kind of religiosity that they deemed was important. Her time abroad is, on the one hand, a privileged experience of an upwardly mobile life. In this sense, not only travel but also being able to live abroad within a diverse international, multi-lingual, affluent and often gated (if not physically, then socially) community is a particular form of upper middle-class cosmopolitan privilege (Bourdieu 1984; Garcia-Moreno 2019). While the word cosmopolitan denotes being 'of the world', in this instance, it implies an experience of the world in terms of having access to social networks and spaces that suggest an upper middle-class life and potential mobility into the upper-class. In Dhaka, as elsewhere, access to an English and foreign education, fluency in multiple languages, and the ability to travel widely are all markers of upper middle if not upper-class life.[83] Samia Khala's religious education, and her subsequent emphasis on the importance of the essential nature of Islam is intertwined with these experiences of place and world. Her experience can thus be viewed as part of wider global class structures, and an orientation towards a privileged sense of globalisation in education, but also as unique in the context of Dhaka, in that nobody I met throughout my time in Dhaka or since then had quite the same experience of a religious education as she did.

As I show next, Samia Khala's understanding of Islam as having an "essential nature" contrasts with the more fluid, less fixed or less certain understandings of Islam and faith of my

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[82] Scepticism and jokes about religious figures, particularly *moulavis* and *hujurs* – generic terms for religious instructors as well as an insult for people who are prone to preaching, are common in Bangladesh, as well as in Pakistan (Maqsood 2017:78, 162). Naveeda Khan (2012) has further asserted that such jokes are part of a process of Muslim striving in Pakistan.

[83] The distinction between the two can be found in how many languages one might be able to speak, which kinds, and for what reasons, e.g. family migration abroad out of economic necessity or being sent abroad expressly for language tuition and family-funded (rather than scholarship-based) higher/professional education.

other interlocutors. Many said they do not know what Islam is necessarily about. Zonera once told me, "I don't think that far, I just accept what I have been given and I go with this." Though coming from similar class backgrounds, Samia Khala's experience of having been brought up around the world, with parents particularly dedicated to her religious education, with not only university educated but Ivy League scholars teaching her Islam provided her with an essential understanding of Islam.

Spirituality as a Universalising Experience

Samia Khala's experience of class, the world and religious education were very much oriented by the experience of having lived abroad. This was similar for Hashim Mama, but what struck me more about his story was his experience of returning and staying home. Hashim Mama studied abroad in the US on a scholarship in the 1990s and returned home soon after, albeit with an American passport that allows him to travel much more freely today. His story speaks to a sense of spirituality as a universalising experience, transcending place and cultural context, while simultaneously very much defined by it:

> My experience in America was probably very bad, because of me. I mean, I did not meet spiritual people in that culture during my stay. I blame myself for it, I wasn't searching, I was in Bangladesh when I was in America. It started as soon as I went. But now I think that in every society and every country there is time. Some people have a particular inclination (bent) to look at it [time] in a spiritual way, in a compassionate way.

Though he expressed this in very different ways compared to Samia Khala, Hashim Mama was equally interested in what Islam is, what the scriptures and stories based on the Prophet's life were meant to be interpreted, what meaning they should have in the present day and in the everyday. He was a middle-aged man living in Gulshan with his wife (Zara Mami), mother, three of his four children and household staff. In chapter four I focused on how Hashim Mama spoke of religion as culture. He was educated in the social sciences and humanities, as well as in business studies, and his language and way of talking about religion, to me, spoke to this background, though of course always located in his personal experience of Islam and being religious. Here I focus on how spirituality was an important part of his experience and understanding of Islam and culture in Dhaka.

While in chapter five I explored the ambiguous distinctions between the public and private, I here focus on how spirituality first oriented Hashim Mama homeward and then oriented him towards the world, allowing him to experience the world as a universal whole connected by the spiritual. Here I draw on Sara Ahmed's (2008) notion of feelings as orienting to think about how spirituality affected Hashim Mama and his sense of being in and connected to the world. Spirituality, in this instance, is not only a way of being but itself is a feeling or related to a range of feelings, which I unpack here with Hashim Mama's narrative. Ahmed thinks of people as oriented in different ways, thus allowing for difference, both personal and social, such as different gender identities, roles or sexual desires, to flourish. Her focus is specifically on space and objects, how they allow for different feelings to develop which in turn allow us to feel and look for new paths of becoming. Her work attempts to account for how difference can take place against all odds, against social, historical and political pressures and currents. Hashim Mama often used the word "feeling" to describe spirituality or the lack thereof. It was this feeling that also oriented him towards others who could similarly feel spiritual. His story is important in showing how feelings are orienting, but also how feelings are navigated and regulated very differently. Feeling is one part of becoming 'different', but so is agency and intentional action in what we do with these feelings. His thoughts about blaming himself and feeling bad for not searching for spirituality and spiritual people when he was abroad, speak to the intentionality involved in orienting us towards places and other people.

"Spirituality is the most important thing for me", Hashim Mama would often tell me. His description of his inability to feel or find spirituality in America, compared to Bangladesh, resonates with his narrative about how his religiosity is intimately tied to the physical spaces of Dhaka (see chapter four). Leaving what in Bangladesh would be seen as the security and amenities of life in America, with access to education, jobs, things and services which are expensive, difficult to obtain, or not available in Dhaka, can partly be read as an opportunity afforded by privilege – returning home to less security is possible because it can be afforded, a luxury many migrants from Bangladesh do not have.

At the same time, many people return home despite the risks and loss in opportunities. For Hashim Mama, the spirituality of home, or perhaps the lack of spirituality he felt when he was abroad, oriented him homewards (Ahmed 2008). In the case of Hashim Mama, spirituality linked him to Dhaka (home) and consequently oriented him homewards. This is not to insist on a sense of the world and home as opposites. Rather, they are experienced relationally. It was not only going abroad, but also the act and process of coming and staying home that gave Hashim Mama a sense of the world as whole. The wholeness is brought together through a

sense of shared humanity and feeling spirituality. I asked him what he meant by people who have an inclination to understand time in a "spiritual way". In Hashim Mama's own words:

> I've met people since who come from different cultures but who are like me. My brothers…So I understand that in all societies there are some types of people and other types of people…Actually one of the reasons that I am Bangladeshi is that music has played a big role in my life. So when I hear a song in Bangladesh, I know if it is spiritual or not…classical music is very spiritual for me. Indian classical music. Ghazal is a spiritual classical music for me. So I found all these experiences in ghazal-qawwalis[84]…I thought that European people wouldn't be able to understand this, but I was proven thoroughly wrong….I think wherever you go, if you have spirituality, you will find people like you.

I would not assert that Dhaka is spiritual and home for Hashim Mama, whereas America, the West and the world were devoid of this feeling. Rather, his story reveals that spirituality, influenced strongly by his faith and by the local music styles and poetry that he grew up with, was a universalising feeling drawing people, regardless of cultural and religious backgrounds, together.

Moreover, he asserted that he could have found spirituality in America/away from home if he had searched for it. Though Dhaka and home were important to Hashim Mama for his own spirituality and religious self-making, both are possible elsewhere, away from home, through agentive action (searching). Home to him is thus not *defined* by spirituality. It is not so much a characteristic as it is a feeling for Hashim Mama that he embodied and felt and that drew him towards particular places and people. Dhaka is not imbued with more or less spirituality than other places, but Hashim Mama's relationship to Dhaka and Bangladesh, to home, is very much rooted in the feeling of spirituality that drew him back there. Spirituality as a feeling has, for Hashim Mama, had the effect of sensing and living in the world through the relationality between people, potentially God and place. I take Hashim Mama's struggle to

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[84] Ghazal (pronounced *gojol* in Bangla), meaning "song of love" in Arabic, is an ancient poetic tradition popular across communities in Asia and the Middle East (The Encyclopaedia of Islam 1991: 1028-1036). In South Asia, ghazals were popularised by Sufi travellers and, while having a particular form, they are also recited according to particular traditions and times, accompanied by instruments like the *sitar* (string) or *tabla* (percussion). Qawwali specifically refers to a kind of Sufi reverential singing originating in South Asia, accompanied by instruments like the *dholak* (a type of drum) and harmonium (cf. Bhattacharjee & Alam 2012).

find spirituality in America as an invitation to think of spirituality as relational rather than a simply private matter.

What is important here are the parallels between the idea of a universal experience of religion, a conception some approaches to Islam as a 'great tradition' assume, and Hashim Mama's sense of the spiritual first as place-bound only to find that it is not, that inability to search for it elsewhere outside of Bangladesh was the issue for him. According to Hashim Mama's narrative, religiosity and spirituality are not the same thing, as the spiritual does not seem to necessarily be related to Islam or any religion, but to a particular way of experiencing and understanding time and space. I do not make the comparison between Islam as a little/great tradition, the *ummah*, and Hashim Mama's understanding of spirituality in order to equate these terms, but rather to say that both carry at least the potentiality and to some degree an aspiration to see people as connected. Simultaneously, Mama's experience does not detract from the significance of place in orienting him towards his understanding of spirituality as beyond place and cultural context. What emerges is a sense of world as a whole that is predicated on movement (moving to America and back to Dhaka, searching for spirituality) and staying still (growing roots in Dhaka) (cf. Rogaly 2003; Reeves 2012), oriented/guided by the feeling of spirituality.

Being Reoriented by Place

While Hashim Mama spoke specifically of spirituality as feeling, my other interlocutors spoke of feeling differently, but always in a way that indicated their actions and choices were oriented by these feelings. Beginning with Zara Mami's story, I take the preceding argument further by focusing more closely on how particular places away from home have a reorienting potential. Again drawing on Ahmed's (2008) notion of orientations, I specifically focus on the feelings that different places and travelling create and how these invite people to take particular actions or make different choices. It is an interesting balance between intentional action and an impetus whose origins or reasons are not always or entirely understandable. While the domestic sphere is the initial focal space of *Queer Phenomenology* (2008), Ahmed later writes of diaspora and multiracial experiences of encountering difference at 'home' and away. Here, I too think of Zara Mami's very class-specific experience of migration and living abroad in another Muslim country (Indonesia). While spirituality was not as important to her as it was to her husband, Hashim Mama, her story meditated on her feelings about religion in Malaysia and at home in Dhaka, and how these oriented her towards different kinds of religious becoming.

In chapter five, I attempted to illustrate how my interlocutors like Azia or Arif lived with their doubts in Islam and religion more broadly. I suggested that while sometimes they shared concrete thoughts or reasons/rationales for not practising or believing, a lot of their experience came down to a set of indefinite and diffuse feelings. There I focused on particular objects (the glass door) to make a case for the potential of place and objects in bringing about the feelings that allow their bearers to tread new paths and experience themselves in different ways. Here, I similarly focus on the feelings brought about specifically by the embodied experiences of travelling and being away from home. Zara Mami's descriptions of her faith, practice, and travels reflect the simultaneously universal and particular character of the feelings she describes and the actions they brought about. My point is not only that travelling offers different horizons of experience of religion, class, self and the world. Rather, the experience of encountering different ways of being in different places offers new modes for encountering oneself and how one might extend oneself into the world. Ahmed writes of extending oneself into the world in the sense of moving in the world and in space in order to take action, but that bodies (racialised, gendered and classed) are limited in how they can extend themselves, how they can take up space and move in the world (2006: 6-7; see also Guilmette 2020: 277). Drawing on Zara Mami's story, I think of places as charged (Pigrum 2021), providing potentials for reorientation, new ways of extending herself into the world, and of experiencing the world as a whole precisely through the different experiences of self new places provide.

I had met Zara Mami, an accomplished academic in her forties, many times through Hashim Mama, her husband, and I had known her to be soft spoken, always well-dressed, extremely busy juggling work and a hectic household, while also being a phenomenal cook. I was speaking to Hashim Mama one day when he was treating me to Bangla-Chinese food in Banani and I absent-mindedly asked him if he knew anyone who prayed in Bangla. He said, "Yes, your mami." Laughing, he added, "I always tell her – you're going to hell." I called her the next day and asked if she would be interested in a chat for my research to which she readily agreed. We met some time in the summer after Ramadan in 2019. I came over for one of her famous home-cooked lunches and the house was buzzing with visitors as their eldest daughter had just returned from her first year of study abroad. One of her visitors whisked me away upstairs after lunch to meet her other family members, and I ended up having an interesting discussion with a young woman whose father, she told me, people assumed to be atheist, when he was actually deeply religious. Zara Mami came to fetch me after she had eaten (she would always eat after her guests had finished) and we walked to the upmarket Chef's Table where I treated her to coffee.

A few years earlier, Zara Mami had left her children, husband, friends and relatives in Dhaka and moved to Indonesia to pursue her PhD, a privilege afforded her by financial security, familial support and a good deal of her own fortitude. "While I was there, I wore *hijab*. It was mandatory at my university." She spoke of how she adapted to her surroundings and wore the hijab "both on campus as well as at home to maintain consistency for myself and my neighbours". Yet to her own surprise, her return to Dhaka did not mean that she would live and practise in the way she did in Indonesia. This was not out of conviction or a point she had reasoned for herself, but rather out of a sense, an interior feeling located within – "I don't know why I stopped wearing hijab when I came back. Everyone thought I would continue, I did too. But then I just had this feeling inside". She motioned at this point with her hands, indicating a feeling placed within her body.[85] At the same time, her experience of Islam in Indonesia and her sartorial practices there affected her – being in Indonesia changed how she felt about how she dressed. "I dress more modestly now. I prefer long-sleeves. Except when I wear *sharee*, then I wear a normal blouse." Adapting her bodily and material practices, in specifically gendered ways, both in Malaysia and when she returned, is emblematic of how bodies and selves are affected and oriented by space and place. Many scholars have spoken of veiling as situational, as a response to the social and historical environment in which Muslim women decide to veil or not (cf. El Guindi 1999; Shirazi 2000; Hussain 2010; Fadil 2011; Tarlo 2015; Hussein 2017, 2018). Though context, of course, matters, I am more concerned with the feeling that Zara Mami describes.

On the one hand, Zara Mami took on particular practices and ethics which had been shaped by her experiences of religion in particular places at given points in time – in Dhaka, America[86], Indonesia and then in Dhaka again. Saba Mahmood's (2005) work elaborates on processes of disciplining the body as a means for disciplining the mind, thus abrogating the distances heuristically created between body and mind. A closer look at Zara's motivations indicates her religious ethical formation through material practices, here in the form of modest dressing. At the same time, her reasoning and intentional action was not necessarily important for understanding why she veiled in Indonesia and then did not in Dhaka. Rather, it was the feeling that mattered.

The "feeling inside" that Zara Mami, among several of my interlocutors, mentions, is located in her body, though the actual origin of the feeling is unclear. When discussing the

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[85] I have noticed I do this too when I describe deep-seated feelings that I cannot necessarily put words to.
[86] Where she also studied.

working practice of studio painters, Pigrum (2021) similarly speaks of the 'charged image' – a photograph, a thing found, a smudge on a painting, debris on the floor of the studio – something which causes the artist to respond and practice/create. The charged image can act as a kind of catalyst of creation, but through a relationship that develops between the artist and the charged image. And this relationship does not remain intact, as the nature and form of the charged image is also plural and variable, much as a person may be. This also allows for a certain relationality to develop cerebrally and viscerally, between painter, charged image and painting. Fundamentally, because of the variability and ambiguity of the charged image, the relations that occur are not only cerebral and visceral, but also physical and material. The charged image is tangible and interacts with the painter's body, movements and gestures, along with the paints, sponges, easels, walls, floors, windows, light, smells and sounds of the studio space.

In a similar vein, Zara Mami's adapting her body to religious ethics and the materialities of the spaces she lives in is not only an ethical act and expression of faith. Rather, her bodily practice is deeply intertwined with the place and world in which she is situated, allowing herself to be affected in different ways at different times. The feeling not to continue veiling in Dhaka is an affective experience of and response to not only religion but to Dhaka itself as well. As Fadil (2011) has eloquently argued, not veiling or unveiling is not necessarily about creating a liberal and/or secular self. Indeed, such an analysis fails to "denaturalise a particular notion of the self and one's body that is reiterated and enacted throughout the regulatory powers of the secular" (Fadil 2011: 105). Here I instead think of place, using the vocabulary of Ahmed (2008), as an object that conjures particular feelings when interacting with people, like Zara Mami, creating different desires, intentions, and actions. In this instance, place can be understood as a charged image, in that it brings about a feeling and a reorientation that creates different kinds of possibilities and choices. Being in Malaysia brought about certain feelings and forms of practice and self-formation for Zara Mami, and coming back to Dhaka similarly affected her, reorienting her to dress and practise in new (and old) ways.

This is further illustrated in the way Zara Mami became aware of religious practices and habits in Dhaka compared to her experiences abroad. Her reflections attend to the changes she experienced in herself, which were both conscious/reasoned and a product of feeling. But they also reflect an awareness of religion in place. "In Malaysia", she said, "I was impressed by how casually people are religious, how they just start praying wherever and nobody pays attention. In Bangladesh this is different. People want a special place, a prayer mat, *tupi*, all kinds of things." This is not to be read necessarily as a critique with regard to Dhaka or

Bangladesh. Rather, it was something Zara Mami was quite deeply affected by, allowing her to practise without necessarily feeling any pressure.

This became more clear through her account of her own religious trajectory in Dhaka. Growing up in Dhaka, Zara Mami began to pray in Bangla after she finished her undergraduate degree at BUET (Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology in Dhaka, an elite public institution). "When my mother realised, she was very worried. She told me it's not right. When I met Hashim's *phupi* (paternal aunt), she asked if I knew the *Qur'an shareef*. I said yes but I read it in Bangla. She said it is good I know but I shouldn't read it in Bangla…I wanted to know what I am saying when I pray, what it says in the Qur'an. I understand it much better in Bangla." When she was at university, Zara Mami also experienced a way of being religious that was similar to how she describes religious practice in the public sphere in Malaysia. "When I was at BUET, I had a roommate who wore the hijab and she was religious, she always said her prayers and she would ask me to pray and read the Qur'an. She was fine but it made me uncomfortable so I eventually changed rooms. But I started hanging out upstairs [in the dorm] with some friends. People there would pray, but very casually, they didn't ask me or anyone to join. But somehow we all did."

Zara Mami's memories and reflections on her religious experiences abroad and at home indicate in what ways religiosity and feeling are tied to place, and how this in turn affects religious practice, experience and self-formation. Her experience of other people's practice of Islam in Malaysia made her more attentive to the way she experienced religion around her at home in Dhaka, both in the past and the present. On the one hand, bodily matters became more important to her through her time in Malaysia, a process through which not- or unveiling at home became an active choice. Before it had not really occurred to her to veil. It was through this corporeal practice abroad that she made sense of the materiality of religious life in Dhaka. Mats, *tupi*[87] and books were, she felt, more integral to religious life in Dhaka than they were in Malaysia. In a sense, these materials formalised the experience of religion, creating a kind of relationship of dependency on objects to facilitate prayer.

Similar to Pigrum's charged image, and my extension of this to charged place, Ahmed's (2008) object-oriented and queer phenomenology suggests that objects themselves have a profound potential to impact people's feelings, thoughts, and actions, furnishing subjects with new or different possibilities and choices. Ahmed draws on Husserl's writing table to explore how an encounter with an object can inspire feelings that lead to different kinds of action and

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[87] An Islamic skull-cap worn by men.

ways of being. While on the one hand people are limited by the actions they may be able to take on accounts of regulations of their bodies through racialising, gendered and class-based dynamics, it is these encounters with objects and the feelings they inspire that provide the ground for different kinds of action. From Zara Mami's perspective, praying in Dhaka broadly speaking was made possible through particular objects. Experiencing religion away from home affected her, orienting her to form new practices, forming new or different relationships to objects like *sharees*, blouses, and prayer mats, while also becoming more aware of religious habits at home.

At the same time, different places within Dhaka allowed for different kinds of experiences that have been formative for her. The space for casual prayer during her undergraduate degree, for example, speaks to her experience and valuing of the way she found Islam to be practiced publicly in Malaysia – something she found valuable and comfortable. So while the cities/countries/places may be geographically and experientially (for Zara Mami) distinct, they are connected through their respective effects on Zara Mami to experience and actively live Islam in particular ways.

Similar to Hashim Mama, Zara Mami's going away and coming home, and the feelings she noted as part of this experience, are very much connected to class, but also to her memories and her religious becoming. While the world is largely an experience afforded by class, and affected by identity markers like gender, Zara Mami's particular feelings and choices around her religious practice are indicative of how she both is situated (by class and gender) and is able to situate herself (through her experience of place, religion, and feeling). It is the new possibilities of action and of understanding herself through experiencing different places and encountering objects differently that has allowed her to form new paths of being for herself. Zara Mami's story foregrounds how the materiality of world and place comes to bear on how we experience it and how we experience ourselves. This provides a different avenue for thinking of religious becoming and self-formation as not only a question of self-cultivation and ethical choice (cf. Mittermaier 2012), but through the feelings brought about by physical and visceral encounters with the material world. It is this which affirms the world as a whole, even if made up by vastly different places and experiences of it.

Travelling for Knowledge of the World and the Hereafter

Samia Khala, Hashim Mama and Zara Mami all went abroad for their education and all returned to Dhaka for their own reasons, feelings or fates. As particular as their experiences and life stories may be, they speak to wider conditions and complexities of class and religiosity in and

around Dhaka, while simultaneously being connected to and connecting Dhaka (religion and class) to the world. Here I take the particular spatial, temporal, embodied, and affective experience of Hajj (pronounced more like *hojj* in Bangla) to consider how travelling, specifically for religious knowledge, is a means to experience the world as well as the hereafter. Drawing on the stories of Zonera and Naveed, who I introduced in chapter four, I here consider how embodied experiences of travel to the holy sites of Mecca and Medina during Hajj powerfully orient believers towards the hereafter while also emplacing them in the world, space and time in which their experiences take place. Their narratives highlight experiences that are meant to bring Muslims in particular together as part of a global community, creating and upholding the global connections and frictions of the *ummah* (cf. Bowen 2004), while also being profoundly personal and individual in shaping their relations to the world and Islam.

I draw on the feelings and experiences of Zonera and Naveed on their journey and their reflections thereafter to trace the worlding experience of the holy pilgrimage. I note here that I have not been on Hajj or Umrah as yet, so the experiences I draw on and attempt to speak to here are not ones that I have had myself. I have always been rather ambivalent about whether I would like to go on pilgrimage, due to my anxieties around travelling and being in crowds. Zonera and Naveed's narratives have, however, been a source of personal inspiration to me, which I hope is reflected throughout the remainder of this chapter.

Zonera and Naveed, whom I introduced in chapter three, had gone together on Hajj the year before I came to live with them in Dhaka. They both spoke often about their experiences there, and their stories were rich in details. Since then, Naveed has performed Hajj a second time, in honour of his deceased father who had not been able to go in his own lifetime. Their narratives shed light on Hajj as an experience that connects bodies and places across space and time, this world and the hereafter. It is a process which begins and ends within a particular timeframe, but whose effects take place not only after but also before and beyond the event. To me, the connections that their stories speak of were not only those that forge a global Muslim community, but ones which connect people to places and objects as well, allowing them to be oriented (Ahmed 2008) in a way that is both given by Islamic scripture and Hajj etiquette, while also being a very personal and visceral experience.

Zonera and Naveed described the various places of Hajj, in Saudi Arabia, as well as in Dhaka and on the journey there. Zonera described how, on arriving at their guesthouse in

Mecca, they took an early morning bus to the *Masjid al-Ḥarām* to complete *Umrah*[88] before the five days of Hajj:

> When we got off the bus, I was taking in the *Masjid al-Ḥarām* and then our guide pointed to the *Kaaba*. I was amazed. The tears just came. It was both so humble and humbling. I couldn't believe I was here to say my *fajr* prayers with millions of others. When I came back to my senses, I said a little prayer before the guard sent us on our way. And then we heard the most beautiful *azaan* I had ever heard. It transported me to a different world...Later, I was both excited and afraid of the next five days of Hajj. I kept wondering if God would forgive my mistakes, if I would be able to do what I came here for. I couldn't sleep and my heart was beating so hard I thought I would die in the guesthouse.

Anthropologists have attended to the non-static nature of the rituals of Hajj, the transformational and ethical expectations that people have of Hajjis and Hajjas, and those they have of themselves, and the power of narrating Hajj memories and stories (Eickelman & Piscatori 1990; Metcalf 1996; Mold & Buitelaar 2014; Al-Ajarma 2021). Zonera's description of her first sight of the *Masjid al-Ḥarām* and the *Kaaba,* hearing the call to prayer and her trepidation around not being able to perform Hajj the way she wanted to, highlights the power of the experience of Hajj as well as the potency and impotence in narrating it. Importantly, contributors to Mol's and Buitelaar's (2014) volume on the Hajj have elaborated on the globalising nature of the pilgrimage itself as well as the associated objects and places visited within Saudi Arabia and along the journey to the sites at Mecca and Medina. Here, I focus less on the Hajj as an experience of globalisation, but rather as a means of orientation in terms of personal faith, feeling and practice, as well as in the sense of being oriented to God, Islam and the *ummah*. To me, the immediate responses to the place, sounds, smells and objects of the Hajj, as Zonera described them, speak to the orientations that unfold throughout her and Naveed's narratives.

I situate Zonera's feelings - her inability to calm her racing mind, her anxiety or fear, her sense of dying in the guesthouse - within Al-Ghazālī's sense of travelling as oriented towards the hereafter and in order to be closer to God. The feelings Zonera described very

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[88] *Umrah* is a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina conducted outside of the month of Hajj, when the pilgrimage sites are far less crowded, or alongside Hajj, as Zonera and Naveed did, combining the merits of both. While going on Hajj is a pillar of Islam, Umrah is not mandatory and the rituals differ.

much speak to the condition of wanting to be closer to God, her thoughts being with Him, while her transportation to another world through the *ajaan* alludes to the hereafter. In the *Book on Conduct in Travel* (2019), [89] written in the fifth century of the *hijrī* calendar or eleventh century AD, Al-Ghazālī writes of the object of travel as "something worldly such as fortune or fame or it is something religious" (2019: 7). Here he understands religious reasons for travelling as knowledge, worship, or visiting sites or people to be closer to God or to emulate the behaviour of living righteous people (ibid.). Eickelman and Piscatori (1990) have highlighted that the Islamic idea of travel can be understood as a form of social action that is important to understanding the ideas of Muslim community. Travel in this sense is not only to be understood as a purely individualistic endeavour.

Knowledge, according to Al-Ghazālī, can be understood as religious knowledge, knowledge of the self, and knowledge of God's signs – searching for these is obligatory as much as is the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina (ibid.: 21). In this vein, I see the travels for knowledge of Samia Khala, Hisham Mama and Zara Mami as religious travels. While travelling in itself is meritorious, what matters most is the intention behind the journey. The intention, Al-Ghazālī writes, should always be the hereafter (2019: 21). I take the idea of the hereafter, as a place beyond the world, to think of how the very worldly experience of Hajj orients my interlocutors towards Allah, towards knowledge and the place beyond our material world, as Zonera's description of being transported elsewhere by the *ajaan* describes. What is significant about this moment is the fact that Zonera and Naveed came back from Hajj (some people do not, and it is often also considered auspicious to die on pilgrimage), bringing their experiences with them and very much continuing to live in and become in Dhaka and in this world. In this sense, travelling and going on Hajj, whilst a very personal experience, also presents believers like Zonera and Naveed with new ways to experience themselves, their faith, Dhaka, the world (as a given spacetime) and their place within it.

While sitting together after lunch one weekend, Naveed started talking about the lessons that he and Zonera took before they went on Hajj. This revolved around etiquette, how to behave and share space while on Hajj, in one's accommodations, on the journey to as well as between Mecca and Medina. The conversation was ushered in by the sound of the *ajaan*. Naveed had turned to me and said, "You know, it is actually not correct how the *ajaan*[90] is called here," with reference to the times at which the *ajaan* is called in Dhaka. He did not voice

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[89] kitāb ādāb al-safar. The seventeenth volume of *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn).
[90] Call to prayer.

it as a critique, but rather as a necessary adaptation to the needs of people in Dhaka.[91] The time and form in which the *ajaan* should be given was something he learned during his lessons in preparation for Hajj, which also made him more aware of how religious practices take place in Dhaka. During their preparation for Hajj, they were further told what to wear, how to behave while on pilgrimage and at the various religious sites, and how to perform the various rituals that are part of the experience and practice of Hajj. Hajj and the processes, protocols and habits that structure it are thus in themselves a worlding, self-forming and place-making experience.[92]

More specifically, Naveed's description of their pre-Hajj preparation is emblematic of these processes. These preparations are structures that are put into place to ensure that the Hajj is experienced in particular ways. This requires involving people in body-self processes that will allow them to practise in particular ways (cf. Mahmood 2005). Bodies and practice are thus engaged in a new dialogic relationship, separate from the everyday, to allow Hajj not only to be performed 'properly', but also for Hajj to be considered valid. Hajj is not only meant to be performed but also experienced in a particular way, which is not to say that all Hajjis and Hajjas experience Hajj the same way or are formed the same way by the experience; but the structures of Hajj, which Naveed explained, imply that the performance and experience are interwoven.

The state and practice of *iḥram* is important here. *Iḥram* refers to the "consecrated state" (Sayeed 2016: 70), which pilgrims to Mecca must be in starting from the borders of the pilgrimage (*mawaqit* – plural; prescribed locations). The *mawaqit* are located along seventh-century pilgrimage routes, with five placed by the Prophet Muhammad and the last set at a later date (Toorawa 2016: 221). Now when people travel on Hajj by air, they may change into/enter *iḥram* at the airport they land in; however, if the plane's route crosses over a *miqat* (singular), pilgrims will put on/enter *iḥram* before they leave their homes for the airport (ibid.: 222). In the state of *iḥram*, the body is maintained in a state of purity for the entire pilgrimage, and many mundane habits and interactions are suspended or limited (Sayeed 2016.:71). Whereas men are required to wear two pieces of plain, unstitched, white clothing, women can wear anything but must be dressed modestly and not veil their hands or faces (ibid.).[93] Both the ritual

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[91] He also stressed at this point that if I write about this, I need to ask him for further explanation, which I did.

[92] The *Book on Conduct in Travel (*kitāb ādāb al-safar) and the *Book on the Mysteries of the Pilgrimage (*kitāb asrār al-ḥajj)*, both volumes in *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn), provide guidance on how to behave, act, and feel during the different stages of Hajj. These are very much tied to the particular moments and places of the pilgrimage.

[93] Sayeed (2016) makes reference to Abdul Karim Zaydan's *al Mufaṣṣal fī aḥkām al-mar'a wa l bayt al muslim*, (1997), vol. II, which addresses the differing emphasis on particular rites and practices during the Hajj by different Islamic schools (Sayeed 2016: 70). This also includes debates on the correct practice of *ihram*.

clothing and the consecrated state are referred to as *iḥram* – one thus wears *iḥram* while also being in the state of *iḥram* (Toorawa 2016: 221). Toorawa (ibid.) writes of the confusion that arises due to the dual meaning of the term *iḥram* as both physical attire and a sacralised state. I take this dual meaning of *iḥram* as an invitation to consider the material and immaterial as necessarily conjoined in the experience of Hajj. The body is not only to behave and be clothed in particular ways, and to feel and experience in a specific way, but it is also intimately tied to the materiality of space and place, moving through the earth's atmosphere by plane, crossing the borders of the pilgrimage sites, entering Hajj at a specific moment in time and for a particular duration, interacting with its places and objects in specified ways.

Zonera's story shows how the processes which are given and learned before Hajj ensure that a valid experience is had, in line with Islamic exegesis, yet this does not mean that the experience will be the same for everyone. Naveed similarly spoke about his experience at the *Kaaba*, the ancient cube-shaped building at the centre of the Sacred Mosque (*al-Masjid al-Ḥarām*). While circling the edifice in the ritual seven-circuit movement (*ṭawāf*) on the first day of Hajj, the crowds were too dense for him to be able to touch the Black Stone, as is the custom for each circuit during *ṭawāf*. The extreme density of people during Hajj is accounted for in contemporary preparations for Hajj, as the crowds not only surround the *Kaaba*'s immediate proximity, but now also perform *ṭawāf* on the ground floor and upper balcony of the Mosque. As not everyone is able to touch the stone, it is permitted to point towards it at every circuit around the *Kaaba*. Naveed performed *ṭawāf* with the crowds just around the *Kaaba*. "There were just too many people, so I couldn't get to the stone even if I pushed through," Naveed explained. "I decided to wait, and I prayed that I might be able to touch it once. And then, suddenly, towards the end, when I faced the stone, a path suddenly cleared before me in a direct line towards the stone. So, I was able to pass through and touch the stone." Both Naveed and Zonera's stories highlight how the experiences of the particular time, places and objects during their pilgrimage were deeply personal and important for their religious-secular becoming. The experience of the *Kaaba* is embodied in terms of the performativity and selving involved, the sensorial experience of touching and seeing the *Kaaba*, of being touched by it, of being heard by God, of hearing the *azaan*[94] and being transported away. But together, these experiences are both grounded in this world, in space and time, while also orienting ("transporting", to use Zonera's word) them towards God and the hereafter.

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[94] Call to prayer, also *ajaan* in Bangla.

This becomes clearer with the experiences of the different stages and places of Hajj. Zonera described their journey from Mecca to Mina and Arafat as trying:

We stayed in tents, with about twenty inmates. We slept on narrow mattresses placed on the carpeted floor. The desert coolers in our tent weren't working either, and there was nothing to do except find a mattress and settle down. I tried not drinking too much so I wouldn't need the toilet but at 40+ degrees, it was impossible. The air in the tent was pregnant with the sound of people snoring, saying prayers, breathing, and the smell of coconut oil and dinner. The next day was very difficult, with people collapsing from dehydration around us. But relief came in the evening with the rain, finally cooling the air….We arrived the next day in Arafat. We only had carpets for beds and the grounds were dusty and rough. Again we had no fans or desert coolers. The rows of neem trees were the only source of shade so we stood underneath those in the heat. Around noon I found myself sitting in a wheelchair while Naveed poured cool water on my head and rubbed ice cubes on my hands and feet. After *Zohr* prayers, I stood up and prayed under the open skies. I looked around at the brown, barren grounds and was thinking about how it would feel to be here again on the Day of Judgement. Will I be standing under the same neem tree? Will Naveed be by my side holding an umbrella to give me shade? Will I meet my favourite aunt? At these thoughts, I felt the tears roll down my face. All I did was pray. The Arafat grounds gave me an eerie feeling. Despite the heat and the physical discomfort, there was something calming about this place. After *Asr* prayers, when the spiritual leader of our group was holding a long supplication, out of nowhere a breeze started to blow. It gave us so much relief! It reminded us that Allah provides relief after pain, just like the rains at Mina tent did.

Zonera's descriptions both highlight the physical challenges, feelings and experiences she lived through at different places on her journey. The experience of extreme heat and then divine respite, her thoughts of judgement day and death that came to her in Arafat and Mina speak of an orientation towards the hereafter while placed in the world here and now. Reflecting on her journey, Zonera spoke of unconditional charity, the power of intentions and the need for the hereafter:

The narrow mattresses we slept on at Mina and Arafat tents made me realise that it's the size of my grave and that I don't think about the Hereafter often enough. In this

temporary journey called Life, we spend so much time fighting over property, backbiting, desperate for wealth, name and fame, Facebook Likes – all immaterial in the end. I realised that though Death is the great leveler as they say, Hajj drives home the point when one is alive.

Their life in between and around the various stages of Hajj also speak to the various, deeply personal and worlding experience of the pilgrimage. Both Zonera and Naveed spoke at length about the guesthouses and hotels they stayed in, the restaurants and shops they frequented and the people they met on their way. Staying at the guesthouse in Mecca when they first arrived, Zonera described how she had to adapt to her new environment and the daily joys in between prayers and travelling:

> I had to get used to sharing the bathroom with others, and to mingle with other women, mostly from Sylhet. I had never been around such a mix of different people from such different backgrounds…At the guesthouse, I got used to the spit and date seeds on the stairs and the street. The smell of the toilet always hit me when I went into our room…Our daily moments of happiness came from the dinners we had outside to get away from the oily meal provided by our agency. We made friends with a couple from Dhaka whom we are still close to – they took us out and treated us every day. After dinner, we would wander over to the hypermarket. I was constantly amazed by the towers of fruits, nuts, cheeses, meats, and the rows of sweets and baklava.

Zonera's experience of meeting new people, making friends, seeing millions of different faces and sharing prayers is close to wider experiences of travelling for leisure and simply for the purpose of being elsewhere, experiencing other things and places, being open to them (cf. Werbner 2011; Raghavan 2017). The way she describes her last nights in Mecca offer further testament to the city itself being part of a wider process of globalisation:

> When we returned to Mecca, we moved from our guesthouse to a comfortable hotel very close to the *Kaaba.* I was amazed by the vastness of the Haram Sharif…I stayed up at night looking at the lights of the mosque, the domes, the minarets, the devotees…The only thing I wouldn't miss were the cranes being used for the

construction work. Someday I hope to come back to a crane-free skyline of Masjid al-Haram.[95]

The brilliant lights of the mosque, the beautiful sounds of the *ajaan*, the image of people praying, sleeping, eating together – Zonera's words conjure a deeply sensorial and visceral experience of Hajj.[96] Her descriptions are also in many ways political. The hotels, guesthouses, tents and facilities she was using in are also markers of class and where in the world you are from, something which Saqib (chapter four) pointed out to me as well. Toorawa (2016) describes, from a personal account of Hajj, the geopolitics and global hegemonic racism and classism which is also present in the physical layout and ordering of Hajj.[97] The account argues that the equality of dressing the same and sharing a common presence is more applicable to men, as their clothes are prescribed, but even then, this is only true for the five days of the Hajj. The remaining days are rife with displays of wealth and status, and at Mina the accommodation tents in which all Hajjis reside are ordered according to nationality, with European and American tents being airconditioned and closest to amenities, whereas South Asian and African tents are not (ibid.: 224). Zonera's reflections complement Toorawa's descriptions. Set within the framework of global hegemonies and systems of oppression, Hajj was then to Zonera not only a religious experience, but another affirmation of her place in the world.[98] Raghavan's (2017) sense of cosmopolitanism as a corporeal experience mediated by privilege and oppression are alive in this story of Hajj too. While coming from a solidly middle-class background in Dhaka, with all the markers of a privileged education, Zonera's story as a

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[95] In a sobering photographic and documentary film series entitled *Desert of Pharan* (2012-2015), the Saudi Arabian artist Ahmed Mater has documented the rapid and constant transformation of Mecca. While the mosque and sites of prayer and worship are constant, the city is not. The politics of migrant workers, predominantly from other parts of Asia and Africa, including Bangladesh, is also part of this transformation, to which Mater's work also offers testimony.

[96] Many of her descriptions are taken from her own written accounts that she wrote for herself and shared with me. I have represented them here, with slight alterations so as to maintain her and Naveed's anonymity. All quotes and alterations have received her permission.

[97] The management of Hajj and incorporation of Hijaz, the region in which the sites of Hajj are situated, have been under Saudi jurisdiction since 1924. A first rule under a Saudi-led government took place in the early 19th century already, yet this ended abruptly with an Ottoman-Egyptian invasion after their presence in the region and on Hajj was curtailed (Al-Sarhan 2016). Al-Sarhan (2016) describes the contestation over the rule of Hejaz and Hajj as both a question of religious conviction as well as geo-political control, particularly between the Saudi Sultanate of Nejd, the then Hashemite Kingdom of Hijaz, the Ottoman Empire and Egypt.

[98] Zonera deals with 'shadism' at home, due to the fetishisation of light toned skin (*forsha*) in Bangladesh and wider South Asia, or perhaps everywhere. Her knowledge of racist immigration structures for regular immigration paths, currently most notably to Canada and Australia, have also impeded her from applying for immigration to these countries despite her academic background and extensive professional experiences. The main reason she and Naveed have considered this path is for the 'right' passport which would allow them to travel more extensively and hassle-free.

Bangladeshi woman on Hajj is both about orienting her towards the hereafter while simultaneously grounding her and requiring her to contend with the world and all its layers of power. It is precisely also the hereafter that is important for being able to deal with the world as it is.

I end here not to emphasise the systems of global oppression that are alive within the structures of Hajj too. Rather I have intended to show how being oriented towards the hereafter is important for being alive and for being able to experience the world as the world. Zonera and Naveed's accounts, their continued friendship with the older couple they met on Hajj, and their frequent reflections on their experience back in Dhaka are testament to the idea that religious experiences of place are worlding in that they offer an orientation beyond the world while firmly placing us within it, here and now. The Hajj both requires a particular kind of performance, experience and subjectivation that shapes individuals, like Zonera and Naveed, who complete the pilgrimage and then return home, differently. This is not to say the Hajj produces the same kind of subject, nor does the Hajj produce 'complete' subjects.[99] Taking these experiences, feelings and knowledge – to use Al-Ghazālī's phrase – back to Dhaka and on all their journeys to come, Zonera's words in particular show how being oriented towards the hereafter is an important part of being in the world (as a believer), while encounters with the places and objects of Hajj orient them towards God by having their own experiences of Hajj while performing it in unison with other Muslims.

Conclusion

The stories of Samia Khala, Hashim Mama, Zara Mami, Zonera and Naveed speak of different layers of worlding, of experiencing the world as a whole and as one. I have taken Nadasdy's (2021) sense of the world as one that is based on shared experiences of being human, or rather on humans being able to experience it. I have drawn on my interlocutors' stories here to show how their religious practices, belief and feelings are oriented by places and their experiences of traveling and living abroad, as well as by coming home to Dhaka. But this itself is predicated on relations of power and axes of class privilege and exclusion that form a particular paradigm of the world and what it means to be living in it.

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[99] The artist Hamra Abbas has created a series of prints titled *Kaaba Picture as a Misprint* (2014), which explore how religious rituals or events that are performed the same way are actually always experienced differently. She does this by rearranging the rectangular forms that make up the *Kaaba* to mimic the ways in which experiences of the same thing unfold in unique ways.

My interlocutors' stories of their faith, their memories, learning, feelings and experiences of Islam in different spaces and times speak to the sense of Islam as global (a great tradition) and Muslims as a global community. But they also speak of the deeply particular and personal ways in which they have come to see the world and their place within it. On the one hand, their stories speak of how transformative worlding experiences are of them as individuals, but also of being Bangladeshi upper middle-class in a global or foreign context, and of the places where their experiences take place. It is in this way that Dhaka is inhabited not only in relation to its own histories and materiality, but also in relation to places beyond its borders and its inhabitants. While in previous chapters I focused on my interlocutors' particular experiences and orientations within the spatial-temporal, socio-political context of Dhaka, I end here with how their orientations elsewhere are part of the spatial-temporal and socio-political context of the world today, as well as of Islam as a global religion, whilst also having led them to the various, personal religious-secular becomings they are following today.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The majority of this thesis has centred the spaces my interlocutors inhabit within Dhaka specifically. My aim was to develop an understanding of the Muslim upper middle-class in Dhaka in relation to the city. The central argument of this thesis has been that class, urbanity, religiosity and secularity are entangled and mutually constitutive. This thesis is largely dedicated to understanding this dynamic primarily by looking at how my interlocutors navigate religious-secular differences within their class and the ways in which they are oriented by the spaces they inhabit. But class and religiosity extend beyond the confines of Dhaka alone. My interlocutors' travels and experiences abroad, which I expanded on in chapter six, show the ways in which class and religiosity are globally entangled, creating class-specific experiences of the world and their place within in. The urban experience, however, is still imperative in that it shows how their experiences abroad affect how upper middle-class identity is expressed and how Islam is practised and lived, sometimes differently and sometimes reproduced, when they return to Dhaka.

I unpack here how thinking of class, religiosity and secularity, and urbanity together offers a more dynamic and less static vision of class specifically, as well as religious-secular becoming as continuous. This is particularly important in the context of Dhaka, an ever-growing city, in a country with an expanding middle-class, where religion and the secular are habitually debated in the contexts of private and public space. Acknowledging the relationality of class, urbanity, religion and the secular suggests a sense of these less as fixed categories and fast binaries, but rather as fluid and giving way to a Muslim upper middle-class that is very much defining how the city is shaped and used, while simultaneously being shaped by it.

I begin by elaborating on how looking at class in terms of space allows us to trace not only inequalities (cf. Low 2016), but also the middle-class shifts and mobilities my interlocutors in Dhaka have experienced or are experiencing. I then move to show how class is affecting the way religious-secular becoming takes shape for my interlocutors. I show how feelings have become important in providing my interlocutors with the potential to navigate religious-secular difference and to forge their own becomings. I end by showing how the city is an experience mediated by a collage of classed spaces that are, however, crossed and bridged by people of different classes moving between them. On the one hand, this is important in the context of Dhaka and Bangladesh, where class (cf. Akhter 2017; Bengal Institute 2017) and religion (cf. Khondker 2009; Doha & Jamil 2017; Raqib 2020) are already being discussed in terms of the spatiality of the city. More broadly, looking at space, class and the religious-secular

together provides a way for us to think about orientations (Ahmed 2006) and change as processes that are at once social, personal, material, agentive, rational, emotional, divine and fateful. This is important to bear in mind if we are going to learn to talk about Muslim interlocutors in the anthropology of Islam and religion as not only Muslim, and not only aspiring to a coherent self. I show here how this thesis lays the ground for future work in studying interfaith and interclass relations, particularly in plural urban contexts and cities, like Dhaka, growing under the pressures of national middle-income development.

Class as Spatialised

I have made a case here to speak of class in terms of space in order to trace middle- and upper middle-class distinctions in Dhaka beyond consumption and income alone (cf. Fernandes 2006; Maqsood 2017). Following a material approach to class (cf. Srinivas 2009), religiosity and the secular (cf. Meyer 2015; Scheer, Johansen & Fadil 2019; Gupta 2021) was important for understanding how class and religious-secular identities interact and mutually constitute each other. In chapter two, I described how Zara Mami's religious practice was affected by the space on the upper floor of her undergraduate dorm, where she felt comfortable both saying her prayers but also not doing so, and simply hanging out with her friends. The space both affected her way of being Muslim and practising Islam, while the space was also being formed by the (non)practice of the people moving within in. My point is that the materiality of class is best understood through space, and that religious-secular becomings are also formed within those spaces and in relation to class experiences. Zara Mami's story is interesting in that it draws attention to the top-tier universities in Dhaka as rather middle- and upper-class spaces, though the different strata of middle and upper class converge here in a similar way to how they meet in the offices I described in chapter five. It is also within these spaces that the unease around class identity can be traced.

Middle-class identities were a subject of unease for many of my interlocutors. Particularly when I tried to define them as elite or upper middle-class, this was met with some consternation. This is in part due to class being a rather ambiguous, constantly shifting concept and identity category, as Srinivas (2009) suggests. But it is also due to an attachment to a middle-class identity that is unencumbered by divisions suggested by words such as upper, lower or elite. On the one hand, this is related to changing economic conditions in Bangladesh, dominated by a business elite, and the development of the middle-class over the last decades (cf. Mannan 1990; Mondal 2014). As I have shown here, the middle and upper middle-classes of Dhaka overlap in their unease around class identity as well as through their commitment to

a 'good' education, having household help, a desire for security, preferably also private cars, amongst many other indicators.

Rather than trying to define their contours specifically, looking at the middle-classes in a material, spatialised way provides the means to capture the fluidity of middle-class identities and the way they converge with the secular and religiosity. In a city and country like Dhaka and Bangladesh where middle-class categories and self-identification are continuously changing in recent decades (cf. Karim 2012; Billah 2020; Sourav 2021), it is important to be able to study class in a way that bridges the gap between economic income models and people's perceptions of themselves. For example, a company or private car driver may well fall into the middle-class bracket in terms of income, but they may feel very differently about themselves vis-à-vis their employers, who may also fall into the very same, albeit broad, income bracket. To understand the ways in which they differ, more than simply looking at how their families' income has changed over the last few decades (something I would never have been comfortable asking, though people in Dhaka often ask these questions), considering the spaces and neighbourhoods they have lived in and inhabit now offered a better indication of middle-class differences.

Writing about class in terms of the spaces of Dhaka that they inhabit also showed how the unease around class identities can be laid bare ethnographically speaking and not only in words. When my interlocutors living in Gulshan, like Saqib or Hashim Mama, spoke of the area as boring and lacking in something important to their sense of what a middle-class neighbourhood should be, they were, in my view, expressing both a displeasure with how Dhaka has been (mis)planned and changed, but also with what it means to be middle-class (or as I define them, upper middle-class) in Dhaka today. Beyond the context of Dhaka, speaking of class in terms of space provides the possibility to ethnographically grasp shifting class identities and the experiences people have when straddling class lines or living plural class identities. Speaking about class in terms of spaces provides a holistic means to speak of these converging class identities of the middle- and upper middle-classes.

Religious-Secular Becoming through Class

More than defining the upper middle-class in Dhaka according to one kind of religiosity, I have sought to show how the religious, the secular and class mutually and continuously intersect, providing plural ways of being (and not being) religious. The unease my interlocutors in Dhaka felt around class further mirrored the unease around other people's, and their own, religiosities. Many seemed to have a problem with how religion was being interpreted and lived by others

within their class, sometimes carving rifts in friendships and family relationships, such as in Azia's home. Hashim Mama would regularly ask me, "So what have you found in your research? Why are middle-class people here becoming religious in this way?" This was a question that was regularly put to me. Though I think responding to this question with a decisive answer would be preferable to Hashim Mama, I do not think it would suffice to speak of class or religious experience in this way, whether in Dhaka or elsewhere. Rather, I have framed this question in terms of religious-secular becoming, as a continuous, open-ended process. Becoming in this instance makes space for plural experiences and identities as they intersect.

On a phone call to Rani in the autumn of 2021, two years since my last visit to Dhaka, she told me that she was feeling more religious again. When we had lived together in Dhaka in 2018 to 2019, she had said, "I don't know what to believe in. I don't do anything, I don't fast or pray anymore." Back then, Rani had not been too bothered about not feeling as faithful as she might have liked, but she was aware that she had a certain and, in a way, unfulfilled desire to have faith. In 2021, things had changed for her. "I wanted to tell you, I have been praying again." My response was pure excitement, which she loved to mock me for. Later in 2022, Rani was also fasting again, while I was not participating in Ramadan this year. In a way, our roles had reversed since we lived together. While my faith had wavered somewhat, or certainly my practice in the last two years, hers had seemed to find its footing. All my interlocutors go through phases of practising or believing differently. What this highlights again is that religious-secular becoming, as all becoming, is continuous – a continuous "line of flight" (Retsikas 2012: xxx) – and this continuity is also what allows plural identities to take form.

Speaking about religious-secular becoming has been conceptually important to this thesis to map how the trajectories of my interlocutors' religiosities are not clear cut or leading to a specific, defined outcome. Marrying this conception with class experiences was a means to show how being a member of the upper middle-class and religious-secular becoming are trajectories that develop simultaneously and in relation to one another. But the point was not to define a specific way in which Dhaka's upper middle-class is defined by specific religious practices (or lack thereof). Maqsood (2017) has previously described how prayer groups are a form of collective learning and practice for Muslims in Lahore of the new middle-class, particularly amongst women. While I believe a similar thesis could be made for upper middle-class communities in Dhaka, I have not proposed a similar way to define the upper middle-class in terms of particular religious practices. What I have tried to show instead is how the materiality of class, particularly through the access to and experience of urban spaces, affects

how religious-secular becoming takes form and is negotiated. In this sense, class and religion are mutually defined and experienced through space and materiality.

Religious-secular becoming is a deeply class based experience. Given that class is fundamental to how the world is experienced, as I showed in chapter six, we need to look at class to make sense of people's religiosities or lack thereof. Class gives a better sense not just of individual people, but also the contexts in which they are living. Thus, when Hashim Mama speaks about his spirituality as a world view or the need for learning ethics through religion, he was speaking through the socio-political history of Dhaka, and the economic development which permitted his family's social mobility, their move to other parts of Dhaka, and his move and travels abroad. In other words, his religious-secular becoming is personal and irrevocably tied to class development. Seen in this way, class gives a better sense of religion as experience rather than through institutions or doctrines. In particular, looking at religious-secular becoming through class offers a way to trace the interactions between layers of identity and experience.

My aim here has been to work with the anthropology of Islam and the anthropologies of the ethics and the good in order to fixate less on specific kinds of self-formation (cf. Mahmood 2005, Hirschkind 2006) and *religious* ethics as central (cf. Huq 2010; Beekers & Kloos 2017), and more on plural identities and becomings. In part this was to give a more accurate and relatable rendition of my interlocutors' experiences. But it was also a method to engage the plural, global and local power dynamics in which my interlocutors are imbricated, a point Fadil (2019) draws attention to when critiquing the overemphasis on ethics in the anthropology of Islam. Working with Retsikas' (2012) idea of becoming as the potential for exponential difference, I have endeavoured to show the ways in which two major identity categories, religious-secular and class identities, converge. If we are going to speak about Muslim interlocutors as not only Muslim and not only aspiring towards a coherent self, it behoves us to consider more closely how the ethics of Muslim people are not only religiously given, but how class identity and experience affects these also.

In the same way that class inevitably affects in what ways religious-secular becoming takes form and how this is communicated and expressed, religious-secular discourses and personal journeys are also very formative of class. In the context of Dhaka, I would broadly define religious-secular becoming amongst the upper middle-class as based on prevailing discourses about religion in the public sphere, personal histories and on feelings. To understand more fully the connections between religious-secular becoming and class, I turned to space and Sara Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenology. The attention to feelings that space and queer

phenomenology provide offer a means to think through my interlocutors conscious ethical and moral processes, as well as the way they are continuously oriented by their relations to others and their surroundings, here the spaces of Dhaka, towards varied religious-secular becomings. I situate my use of feeling in the interstices of the affect-emotion gap (Schmitz & Ahmed 2014; Rutherford 2016; White 2017), as affect is too often thought of as unconscious, which my interlocutors' reflections were not, and emotion as linguistically defined and socially recognised – for example, the word 'fear' conveys a very specific emotion that can be easily understood, whereas saying that one feels "affected" is much more vague. My interlocutors were well aware that something was pulling or pushing them into different directions of religious-secular becoming, but they were not necessarily able to say what exactly this was, or at least not in specific terms that did not require further elaboration in order to be recognised.

As with the anthropology of affect (cf. Rubin 2012), it is hard to ethnographically capture feelings beyond what people tell me, and even then, it takes time and the ability to relate these feelings in order to discern them at all. I was interviewing in a mix of English and Bangla, but all my interlocutors spoke English so we often lapsed into this. But I would frequently be told by my interlocutors, friends and Bangla instructors that there are a range of very specific kinds of feelings in Bangla for which there are no words in English. To this extent, there is a potential limitation to my description of feelings here, as there may be some or many that were never or could never be expressed (in English). But from the stories my interlocutors shared with me, my sense was that particularly the feelings of doubt, unease and the indefinable feeling that my interlocutors, like Zara Mami, spoke of that made them practise (or not) in certain ways rather than in others, what they and I have termed the feeling from within, are integral to their religious-secular becoming. Rather than speak of specific emotions as markers of class and religious-secular identity in Dhaka, as Pernau (2014) and Chatterjee, Krishnan and Robb (2017) do, I argue that the turn to feeling as a motivation for believing (or not) or practising (or not) differently is a marker of upper middle-class life in contemporary Dhaka.

I have largely foregone speaking of both interfaith and interclass dynamics throughout this thesis. None of my interlocutors were Hindu, Buddhist, Bahai or Christian, some of the substantial minority religious groups in Bangladesh. Apart from the spatial gatekeeping of middle and upper middle-class communities, I have also said little of the dynamics between these classes and the lower and working-classes. My purpose was to speak of how people deal with difference within one (ostensibly united) Muslim and class community. The work I have done here lays the ground for researching interfaith and interclass dynamics, in that feelings could provide a way to study how interfaith and interclass dynamics overlap. Understanding

how feelings are perhaps generational, gendered, faith and class-based could provide a more holistic sense of the ways different classes both intersect and diverge in their class and religious identities, how they relate internally as well as to other classes and faith communities.

This is important in Dhaka, which is historically heterogeneous, and where the growing national middle-class also means greater migration to the capital (Roome, Gapihan & Lee 2019) and hence further heterogeneity in its religious makeup. But it is also important for contexts beyond South Asia or growing middle-income countries. Speaking of the way Muslim communities are written of in the anthropology of Islam in Europe, Fadil (2019), for example, writes that a distinct Muslim identity is overemphasised and that understandings of how they are imbricated in plural power dynamics disappears within this discourse. Looking at interfaith and interclass dynamics together would provide a more heterogeneous and relational perspective than simply looking at one form of identity or community, while focusing on feelings would give a better sense of how experiences of class and religious difference relate and mutually constitute each other.

Urbanity: Reflecting and Affecting Class Insecurities

By centring the urban spaces of Dhaka, I have endeavoured to show how the Muslim upper middle-class is both implicated in the way the city is developing, whilst also being critical of it and at the mercy of other global and local power structures. I described in chapter two how Hashim and Saif Mama are sad and dejected about the spaces of northern Dhaka where they now lived and where their children were growing up. Despite their criticism, they still chose to continue living there for the amenities and access (to schools, work, leisure) their neighbourhoods afforded. Similarly, people living in Gulshan 2 who are critical of the space and architecture, like the Gulshan Society Jame Masjid seen as a bombastic display of wealth, still continue to live here. Rather than think of cities as global (cf. Sassen 1991, 2001) or ordinary (2002, 2008), or of communities simply in terms of the enclaves where they reside (cf. Cavdar 2016; Kuldova & Varghese 2017), what is more telling of urban dynamics is how people of specific classes relate to the city and its spaces, both where they live and where they venture, in divergent ways. The nostalgia, longing and critique my upper middle-class interlocutors voiced expressed both class mobilities and aspirations, and how these connected and splintered off from the way the city is spatially manifesting.

The city seen as a complex collage of heterogeneous spaces reflects and reproduces religious and class plurality and difference, whilst simultaneously trying to control these (cf. Foucault 1986). In Dhaka, people of different religious convictions and faiths can come

together in spaces that are shared by specific classes. In chapter five, I described the office space and how religious differences are negotiated within its confines. Hassan Nana in particular spoke of employing people from different religious communities and ensuring their equal progression, depending on merit. Spaces of urban labour, then, as well as educational institutions, are spaces where people of different religions but similar classes meet and come together (cf. Sen 2019).

But this does not mean that religious tensions do not exist in shared class spaces. In chapter three, I shared Samia Khala's narrative about her experience growing up in government officials' housing complexes in Dhaka. Her story describes the implicit tensions between religious communities within the, at the time still, upper middle-class setting of government officials' housing.[100] While the experience of the urban is thus heavily dependent on class, it is also entangled with other identity categories, like the religious.

Class and religion, as I have argued here, are spatialised experiences. One of my central purposes in centring space in this thesis was to be able to show how the public and private domains figure in religious-secular discourses in Bangladesh and how important they are for creating class experiences. Raqib (2020) has written of the tensions between secular and Islamist movements and the involvement of the state in public spaces, like *Shapla Chottor*.[101] The tensions between religious-secular difference that have been studied as playing out in Dhaka's public sphere (cf. Khondker 2009, Emroz 2017) are also playing out in private spaces, such as in Azia's home with the glass door partitioning (porously) her family and their lifestyles. Azia's home and the glass door, which I discussed in chapter five, become a kind of private-sphere locus of the public debates around what religious or secular practice are allowed in public spaces. Where one can drink (specific enclaves or private homes), what one can drink (local spirits or imported alcohol varieties), when (outside of Ramadan), and who can drink (people who can afford it, predominantly men) is indicative of the negotiations of class and religious-secular markers that extend from the public sphere into the private and vice versa. This was very much reflected in Azia's home and by her lifestyle. In light of this, it does not make sense to think of the urban, class or religion in terms of the private and public as divided, even if people of the middle and upper-classes do continue to draw these divisions (cf. Kuldova 2017). Focusing on class provides the means to study urban environments as a collage of spaces

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[100] I described in chapter three how this has changed with the growing middle-class and more accessible schemes to joining government positions, which has led to them being heavily oversubscribed.

[101] A big square in Motijheel, around the centre of Dhaka.

that create distance and emphasise class and religious difference, even whilst working and living side by side.

Something I discussed in chapter three was Saif Mama sending his driver to pick up *jilapis* (deep-fried, syrupy treats) during *iftar* traffic from the other side of Dhaka. I emphasised how a working or lower middle-class man (I do not know how he himself defines) becomes an intermediary between the public and private spheres of the upper middle-class domain. While he himself is not able to access these spaces on equal terms as somebody who is of the upper middle-class, he becomes important in bridging the gated enclaves of upper middle-class life as they are scattered around the city. Thinking of the city as a web of classed and religious spaces that are connected by the bodies and labours of others shows the simultaneous segregation and connection of space across religious and class boundaries. In the context of private homes, middle- and upper-class people live or work next to working class people, often women, helping around the house. Here too tensions can emerge around religious-secular practices, such as who is saying their prayers, when or if at all, or whether alcohol is consumed in the house. These tensions between lower class and middle- and upper-class people, as employees and employers in private homes, brings the private home forward as a space rife with social significance.

Rather than think of city spaces as divided into public and private domains, it is more important to think of them in terms of how they reproduce class difference and how this relates to senses of and desire for security. In the context of COVID-19 in Dhaka today, upper middle and upper-class people have access to more expensive and a broader range of hospitals, healthcare and treatment options, even just by being able to enter private hospitals with the best equipment. I do not assume that this treatment is necessarily better, as misdiagnoses (sometimes purposeful) are common, hence why many middle- and upper-class people seek healthcare outside of Bangladesh. Speaking to my friends and interlocutors, it is clear that money does not automatically translate to care in the context of elite hospital spaces in Dhaka. Many of these are part of a billion-dollar healthcare and pharmaceutical industry that is very much focused on profit over care. At the same time, Muslims (amongst other religious communities) and of all classes have recourse to religious spaces and local healers (*kobiraj*). This image of urban healthcare and class access hints at the insecurity people of all classes face, though of course to different degrees. These insecurities are exacerbated and overemphasised in the urban context of Dhaka, as elsewhere, further entrenching class differences. Further research on urbanity in terms of these class entanglements would allow us to understand the city, in general and Dhaka specifically, not only in terms of upper middle and

upper-class domination and dependence on the poor, but also in terms of how class insecurities spatially reinforce class differences.

Moreover, it would be interesting to understand religious-secular differences between members of different classes, converging in shared spaces like the office or the private home, are negotiated in Dhaka and other cities where the middle-class is similarly growing. This would require more thoughtful and sensitive ethnography, particularly due to the prevalent power dynamics in private homes and between working-class employees and middle- to upper-class employers. This could potentially leave working-people open to greater vulnerability and insecurity. Rather than showing how one class of people feels differently religious compared to another, it is more fruitful and less simplistic to think about how religious-secular difference is negotiated through class relations. More broadly, this would also give us a better sense of how class relations affect how cities like Dhaka are inhabited and how they are being organised and designed to facilitate class mobility or entrench existing insecurities and difference.

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