The Politics of Belonging through Food:

Place, Space, and Nostalgia in Contemporary South Asian Women's lives in London.

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Abstract

My research explores if and why belonging is pervasive in the everyday lives of South Asian women in London. I examine this through a gendered lens, using food as a proxy for understanding diaspora and identity. I argue ambivalence towards everyday belonging maintains that belonging is a practice, vulnerable to threats and changes. Belonging to a place – be that nation, cities, communities, or families – are not fixed but a unique and individual negotiation. The politics of belonging, therefore, is a practice of attachments – cruel positive, hopeful, uncomfortable, and political – where the participant, from their positionality, experience belonging and the everyday differently.

Acknowledgements

In this project, many participants share their stories of family and migration. In this space, I want to acknowledge my own. My parents and my brother have always been the most consistent attachment in my life. While we moved across borders countless times, they were my stable geography. Together, we became experts at packing and added new foods to our diet wherever we lived. I can't speak enough to their sacrifices; however, I don't think this word satisfies how loving, generous, and encouraging my parents are. My mum has been suggesting I write a book since I could write. My dad has boasted a potentially bogus anecdote of my 'photographic' memory for years. My brother has attempted to coach me as if he were my football manager. I owe everything to this family, their love, and our mutual obsession of a good meal. I remain optimistic and hopeful in my every day because of them.

I want to thank the many supervisors that have contributed to this final project. I want to thank Alex Colas for his adamant position that this thesis needed to focus on food and place – which eventually unlocked everything that followed. I want to thank Nadine El-Enany for her valuable insights and, most importantly, making me reconsider belonging so I could critique it outside my own biases. I would also like to thank Lisa Tilley who supervised this project in its early stages, especially throughout the difficult period of Covid-19. A special thanks to Dermot Hodson for his encouragement, his passion for the PhD process and conversations about music.

One of the upsides of my continuous migration has been my friends across borders who are part of my every day even though we no longer share the same space. Mike, Kevin, Ivan, Karthik, Grant, Brittany, Sam, and Shuchira are friends outside of my London life who challenge our different time zones. Closer to my now London home, Laura has become the family member who happily eats rajma with me. Thanks to Sean, who offered advice on my garrulous ways, food chats, and introduced me to the relief of disc golf during the trying days of the PhD. Thanks to Isabelle, Kim, Tom, Jules, Sophie, Del, Sam, Emily, Jack, Mairead, Jon, Brii, and Romano – your company is what I most look forward to. These friendships (and dancing with Chris) have sustained good moods and challenged the bad ones.

I want to thank the participants in this research for their time, vulnerability, stories, and trust. It is challenging to write about belonging when the conversation makes you consider the ways you do not feel welcomed in the country you live in. The participants who ate with me, the chefs who fed me, Southall Black Sisters and the women who shared their memories – they made the hours we spent together the best part of this research. I hope I have done justice to your stories.

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1 Introduction

Walking through London, you are bound to see billboards, posters, adverts, or campaigns that, more often than not, reflect a hopeful message of multiculturalism. Examples include –

I*mmigrant, a recent 2023 ad campaign by World Remit, is an international money transfer company that facilitates remittances globally. Their initiative is to demonstrate how 'migrants make a world of difference'.[1] Portraits of migrants accompanied by a short tagline of their job and their country of remittance demonstrate the labour and efforts put in the UK and the difference made for their families back home.

In 2020, HSBC UK started the New Year with a brand-new marketing campaign titled 'We are not an Island', which focused on 'home and belonging', with the intention to promote this idea that no matter your background, you belong in Britain, as shown below.[2]

HSBC Advert, 2020

Naturally, many assumed this was a response to Brexit, pro-immigration, and, according to HSBC's Chief Marketing Officer, 'culturally relevant'. The London specific advertisement claimed 'you're salt beef bagels eaten outside curry houses'.

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[1] *I*mMigrant: Migrants make a world of difference* (no date) *WorldRemit*. Available at: https://www.worldremit.com/en-gb/im-migrant (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

[2] Stewart, R. (2020) *HSBC's 'we are not an island' ads return with pro-immigration message*, *The Drum*. Available at: https://www.thedrum.com/news/2020/01/14/hsbcs-we-are-not-island-ads-return-with-pro-immigration-message?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter (Accessed: 11 March 2024).

The Department of Transport released an ad in 2023, featuring a Filipino-British Nurse who was the first to administer the COVID-19 vaccine. The ad claimed, 'We give the world our best'.[3]

A group of migrants and refugees partnered with Autograph and Mouth that Roars to organise an exhibit in 2021 titled 'Sense of Belonging'. This project invited people to reflect on issues of home, identity and belonging, highlighting challenges of language, culture, community.

> One of the main jobs of the minoritized arts that circulate through mass culture is to tell identifying consumers that 'you are not alone (in your struggles, desires, pleasures)': this is something we know but never tire of hearing confirmed, because aloneness is one of the affective experiences of being collectively, structurally unprivileged' (Berlant, 2011).

Belonging, and the desire to belong is a powerful feeling. As evidenced by the campaigns and adverts mentioned above, home, identity and nation are strong indicators that make up this complex feeling of belonging. Early in my research, I had hoped to identify how the sense of belonging can be improved for South Asian women in London. In *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant questions what it means to feel a sense of something instead of thing itself – in other words, what does it mean to feel a sense of belonging instead of just belonging? My initial query of 'sense' had already offered a potential response – belonging is not a permanent nor a fixed state. I argue that to feel a 'sense' is to recognise moments in which belonging can be practised. Therefore, I would never have come to a precise and unchanging conclusion on how to 'improve' a sense of belonging – it will be different for each individual and dependent on their unique positionality.

Instead, this research explores what belonging means and seeks to answer why it is pervasive in the everyday? What role does nationality play in fostering a sense of belonging for a South Asian diaspora? What is the role of food as a marker of nationality and belonging? And importantly – how does one articulate their belonging? In the thesis, articulation is about the active recognition and negotiation of belonging where participants parse through their experiences and their desires of belonging to express their attachments. As a story and narrative driven research, articulation is an important means of understanding why belonging matters.

To establish why belonging matters, I also deliberate on how it is practised. Through articulation and practice, I emphasise the importance of difference. As I'll explain in this chapter, the participants are of different age, background, and religion. Some were born in the UK, while others migrated at different points in their life. Their experiences are not homogenised as South Asian women in London. Their difference is a point of examination – to consider how they articulate and practice belonging. Racial, gendered, and class dynamics

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[3] Garcia, N. (2023) *Dot honors Pinay nurse in new 'best' ad in London, draws mixed reactions*, *Philstar Life*. Available at: https://philstarlife.com/news-and-views/840475-may-parsons-honored-in-london-ad (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

are forces that influence the way the participants experience belonging – yet, given their positionality, the way belonging is threatened, challenged, and practised will be different.

In chapter 3, I introduce participants AC and EG. EG was born in the UK, while AC migrated as a teenager to London. As a result, AC's relationship to India and her ambivalence to belonging in the UK is more visible than EG's. The following chapters similarly highlight the distinction of experience between two participants. In Southall, FN and SH share their stories of belonging where FN has only been in the country for a few years while SH has lived in London for over 20 years. Their duration in London becomes a point of examining the way in which the desire for belonging persists, and how it is threatened over time. Finally, in chapter 5, the chefs I interview represent a generational difference in how they think of their roles as representatives of a South Asian culture through food in London. The difference amongst these participants is an invaluable way to recognise the complex discourse of belonging – the inconsistencies, the similarities, and differences are part of how belonging is felt and practiced. These narratives are, in one regard, a comparison of experience between participants, but most importantly, it is a recognition that belonging is unique and the diaspora is not homogenous. By understanding the experience of South Asian women in the diaspora, I aim to map the different ways the participants negotiate with their identity, and how food is a political practice of belonging that is experienced in moments and spaces. In meetings with Southall Black Sisters, in working in kitchens with other women, or in preparing a meal, these participants articulate their ambivalence, daily negotiations of identity and place, and their sense of belonging.

This research is about three things – people, place, and food. It is a composite of narratives, of political and sociological theory, and of personal stories. I begin by sharing a story of people, place, and food to 'set the table' of this research.

Research Story

I met a South Asian scholar, KV, who was visiting London from the US. She suggested we meet at Drummond Street – a place with several South Asian restaurants – for lunch. When we met, directed by KV, we visited every restaurant on the street. In each establishment, KV would speak to the staff in their language (Bengali, Punjabi and so on), inquire extensively on their food, and we'd move to the next. We settled on a place out of fatigue and hunger. Unimpressed by the buffet, she ordered exactly what she craved – saag paneer. When the food arrived, she was taken back by the vibrant, neon-green colour of the dish, which she claimed lacked seasoning. 'This isn't Punjabi food', she said, but eventually came to terms with the food being 'something else', adjusted the salt, and enjoyed it for its freshness, nonetheless. During our lunch, she used 'authentic' to describe the first restaurant we did not have cash for, and assumed it paled in comparison to the 'buffet' restaurants that didn't seem to serve the South Asian clientele, but the (white) British worker or traveller by Euston Station.

Mid-bites, she told me about a particularly 'handsy' uncle growing up, while making sure to never lose my gaze to make sure I understood exactly what she meant, but without expanding in more detial. While describing home in India, she said, 'you know how it is in India – you

have breakfast, then you start preparing for lunch, and then it's dinner time'. The 'you' are predominantly women, although now, as KV suggests, most middle-class homes are likely to have helpers, majority of whom are women. In her joint family experience, women were always in the kitchen. The image of the 'handsy' uncle, the relentless responsibility of cooking, and living in a shared home, made the kitchen seem like a space of both duty but also escape. The kitchen was where all the women of the house were expected to perform unpaid labour to feed their family. At the same time, the kitchen was a space where women could avoid the men in the family, and potential violence, a space to be together and form their own kinship and community. This lunch, a seemingly mundane outing with a South Asian writer, registered at many levels of this thesis – a combination of people, place, and food. A diasporic South Asian woman, negotiating with the complex feelings of home, food, and gender, while searching for comfort in a known Punjabi saag paneer.

Setting the table for research

This research has been a four-year long project that has seen incredible shifts in the policy and narratives of what it means to be British. There are far too many unique moments to cover individually, but I want to highlight some of the major developments that have influenced and impacted the research design, questions, and overall outcome of the project.

As I'll expand on in the methodology, the research design I had started with, inevitably, is not the design that endured these four years of study. The first and foremost interruption of COVID-19 required major adjustments and flexibility, delaying the fieldwork. However, the more important consideration is what the pandemic challenged about the feeling and sense of home – it required a redefinition of 'home' where comfort and safety were heightened as a space of protection from an unknown virus, of work, school, and care, and for some, a sustained exposure of discomfort and potential violence. On a more macro level, 'home' as a shorthand for the nation amplified an anxiety of where home is and what that means if you reside outside your 'designated' (i.e., passport-dictated/birthplace) home. It is exactly something we encounter in the everyday, such as home, when thoroughly examined which reveals its complexity. Every person will have a different and unique relationship with 'home', however, as referenced below, the subject of home, itself, is a pressing matter of political, social, and everyday experience.

> Widespread media coverage of mass migrations resulting from political turmoil (with most recently, the crisis in Ukraine) shed light on alternative understandings of home, with issues of statelessness, national identity, forced relocation, longing/belonging, acculturation, and assimilation becoming increasingly pressing. Home can thus be problematised as a site of inequality; inequality in accessibility; inequality of ownership, and inequality in the division of domestic responsibility…(Gallon and Lewis, 2022).

This research does not centre COVID-19 as a point of examination, however, the significance and impact of which, during the time of research, is undeniable. The pandemic demonstrated the contradictory realities of global solidarity while re-emphasising national boundaries, even restricting movements based on nationally manufactured vaccines. For example, some

countries did not accept Indian or Chinese-based vaccines, which meant many were not able to travel freely because of what vaccine was available and administered to them. The health of 'home' was not just a concern of individual health, but the health of families and friends living elsewhere, extending to monitoring the surge of COVID and health of other nations. The requirement of 'staying home' or, for the push to return 'home' contributed to the internal dialogue of where does someone of a diaspora belong? While the weight of these concerns is unique to each individual, the questions of home and belonging are a relevant part of the social and political narrative of 2020 and beyond.

Additionally, COVID-19 and the government response to the pandemic also brought to the fore existing inequalities of race and gendered labour in the country at large and in private spaces in the home. There have been significant contributions to literature on gendered domestic labour responsibilities during lockdown and the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on racialised minorities in the UK. Such realities were heightened by the death of George Floyd in the US, which intensified an omnipresent suspicion of those in authority and their treatment of marginalised communities. Calling out police brutality to the British government's hypocrisy and handling of the pandemic, the effect of COVID-19 cannot be simplified to any one factor but the confluence of several identities. The intersection of race, gender, class, nationality, occupation, biases, housing, and more are acting at the same time to deepen inequalities of everyday life.

The start of the pandemic coincides with the start of this research. However, I want to stress that this thesis does not look at the impact of COVID-19 on belonging, but rather I aim to situate the context in which I conducted the research and the ways in which, consciously and subconsciously, our everyday lives were impacted. Several other key moments in British society, migration policy, and everyday rhetoric contributed to the environment in which these racialised conversations of belonging took place. I do not wish to reduce such moments to mere footnotes but want to depict the hostile environment for what it was (and is) to contextualise the questioning of belonging in the UK pertinent to this research, especially when considering how and why the desire to belong persists?

In 2012, then Home Secretary, Theresea May, clearly stated, 'The aim is to create, here in Britain, a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants'.[4] This aim has persevered throughout the years resulting in several initiatives, but the overall objective remains – 'the hostile environment demanded they prove they had the right to be here'(Goodfellow, 2019). The 'they' cannot be simply identified as 'immigrants' alone, although the intention is often directed at the 'illegal' immigrant. Illegal is emphasised as a promise and demonstration of the state's protection – where the illegal 'carries with it an assumption of inherent criminality and immorality; if you are 'illegal', you are bad'(Goodfellow, 2019). Importantly, the word 'immigrant' represents 'all different things; messy and shifting, it is, at times, conflated with race or ethnicity, and it's applied to people seeking asylum or who have refugee status' (ibid). In the research, I use 'diaspora' and sometimes 'migrant' rather than 'citizen' purposefully as

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[4] Hill, A. (2017) *'hostile environment': The Hardline Home Office policy tearing families apart*, *The Guardian*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/nov/28/hostile-environment-the-hardline-home-office-policy-tearing-familes-apart (Accessed: 28 July 2023).

a way of exploring the cultural identity of the participants as it is the foremost theme of the project. Participants express their relationship to the country – either by stating 'British-born Pakistani' or with the general hyphenated identity of 'British Asian' or as migrants. Such identities, along with their intersections (gender, class, religion, and more) hold a lot of weight and judgement and can also be employed as a bordering tool to differentiate between a particular kind of person who has rights versus those who do not. As outlined in *Hostile Environment: How Immigrants Become Scapegoats* (Goodfellow, 2019) and in *Against Borders: The Case for Abolition* (Bradley and De Noronha, 2022) to argue for rights on the basis of citizenship does not actively dismantle the system which organises people into categories of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' as they see fit.

The Windrush scandal, which broke in 2018, is an example of such a campaign that questions citizenship and rights. Those who migrated from the Caribbean to the UK before 1973 were reclassified as illegal immigrants and lost their 'British' status, where many were deported, detained, and denied rights or care. The actions of this policy treated those who were previously given the right of residence as those viewed and labelled as 'illegal immigrants' who are the usual targets of the hostile environment. However, it is the treatment under this policy, which denies fundamental rights, that should be problematised and not the identity nor status itself. As demonstrated by the Windrush scandal, these identities are shifting in and out of favour as the state sees fit – arguing based on 'citizenship' does not undo problematic notions of who deserves access to fundamental rights. The notion of membership *to* (country, city, neighbourhood, community, family, etc) is at the heart of the research question – what and who does one belong *to*? How is it articulated or practised, especially in response to such policies and political rhetoric? Can belonging be better defined outside the membership of a nation?

There are several other shifting policies that continue to have a profound impact on this research. The adoption of a points-based system that began in January 2021, which introduces a 'salary and skills threshold', requiring 70 points to even be eligible to apply for a visa.[5] Moreover, those on student visas will no longer be able to bring family members unless they are on a post-graduate research route. Seen as a 'misuse' of the visa system, the now former Home Secretary Suella Braverman has been the face for an increasing number of similarly discriminatory and racist adjustments to 'control the border' – the protection of society is dependent, according to Braverman, on the management of migration. Her initiative to send asylum seekers to Rwanda has met with significant backlash, and by June 2023 was considered unlawful by the High Court. While such initiatives are of more pressing concern for some over others (those with British citizenship, etc.) such policies and rhetoric take their toll on how belonging, identity, and home can be theorised, experienced, and explored in the everyday. As an international student, I am reminded of my temporary relationship to this country often in subtle and innocuous ways. While at the border at Heathrow airport immigration, I must defend my right to be in this country, even if that right

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[5] *The UK's points-based immigration system: Policy statement* (no date) *GOV.UK*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uks-points-based-immigration-system-policy-statement/the-uks-points-based-immigration-system-policy-statement#:~:text=1.,the%20brother%20and%20immigration%20system. (Accessed: 28 July 2023).

is for a limited time, regardless of the connections I make, the life I build, or the financial contributions I put towards where I live.

The conflict of aspirations, desires, belonging, and the promise of a 'good life' is what constitutes Berlant's concept of 'cruel optimism' – where an attachment to an 'object' is simultaneously desirable and an obstacle. The ambivalent position that I believe many people assume, as is the case for the participants of this research, is one which sustains the desire of belonging but recognises its perils – in other words, 'what keeps people attached to 'objects while staying with disappointment'(Anderson *et al.*, 2023). As Berlant posits, to 'show compassion for our struggles, is really where living takes place'(Berlant, 2011). As the case studies will demonstrate – the narratives allow for the participants to display the struggles, describe spaces of ambivalence, and how belonging might be desired or practised, even when belonging is an obstacle.

So far, I have contextualised migration, nationality, identity and belonging as part of a social dialogue in the UK without mentioning food – which, after all, is a large focus of the thesis. 'Food is about identity creation and maintenance, whether that identity be national, ethnic, class, or gender-based,' and importantly, 'food and food rules is a worldview that emphasises relatedness' (Sutton, 2001). Food, therefore, is the vehicle with which I explore identity, belonging through attachments, memory, and relationships. Food and transnational identities deal with the expression, maintenance, and consumption of attachment to place. Culinary writer Anya von Bremzen's 2023 book, National Dish, traces food as a tool for identity-building. For example, the Ottoman Empire offered public soup kitchens, *imarets*, which became a space for 'distribution of food (that) was both a vehicle for charitable aid and for constructing and affirming a particular social order' (Singer, 2005) to UNESCO's recent declaration of borscht as part of Ukraine's 'intangible cultural heritage list' (Von Bremzen, 2023). A lot of these top-down policies have used food to assert a certain imaginary of what constitutes a national cuisine and therefore community. It is not simply a shared history or citizenry, but a form of practising an identity meaningfully through food choices, or what Berlant would refer to as a 'national symbolic'.

Von Brezemen's work has led to debunking myths of what comprises a 'national dish', where similar dishes were eaten and enjoyed before borders were made – *hummus*, for example, demonstrates the rivalries and national claims put on the dish after the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. The Turkish, Greek, and Arab claims on the popular food item signify how recent and malleable such boundaries really are. This top-down narrative of food and nation eventually makes its way to how people live their everyday lives – a demonstration of how the 'public' interacts with the 'private' – of the politics and the personal. From the Spanish Inquisition, where hanging *jamón* was seen as a signifier of Christianity, persecuting the Jewish and Muslim populations whose faith does not allow for pork consumption to more recent and similar religiously oriented ideas of who belongs to a nation in India. The current Bhartiya Janata Party, strongly favouring a vegetarian-diet inspired national identity, has led to breakouts of violence in the country where Muslim Indians have been assaulted by extreme Hindu Indians. Food can be a tool for exclusion, just as much as it is lauded for its ability to unite. Recognising how cuisine evolves demonstrates a space in which to exercise

the ambivalence of belonging to a nation, reflecting on what that means for one's identity, and challenging this process of attachment to a nation. Food is a way to engage with culture, and, as this thesis will demonstrate, a powerful, symbolic, and emotional way of experiencing an identity that is not static but changing. While place, nostalgia, and memory are strong enforcers of our identity, critical reflection on what informs our attachments (gender, race, and more), through food, can help illuminate the deep entanglement of our belonging. By exploring the relationships with food, nation, community, identity, gender, and more, I make a case for how attachments are formed, maintained, challenged, and can be more hybrid and inclusive.

Methodology

This research is a qualitative study, with a mixed approach of (auto)ethnography, sensorial methods, a focus group, online interviews, and eating together. The variety of methodologies adopted was altered to match what would suit the participants the best – based on their availability, preference of location, interest in dining, and in the project overall. I am using a combination of such methodologies to understand a complex emotion that is belonging. In this research, I write about nationality, identity, migration, gender, and more intersecting aspects of belonging, however, it is my foremost intention to understand how the participants *feel* about their belonging – these narratives are both political and affective. As I will expand on in this section, I do not interview strictly vulnerable populations, however, the nature of this research is dealing with sensitive subjects of trauma, home, migration, colonisation, violence, and more. As such, the process of interviews was a practice of emotionally engaged research, where I, as a researcher, 'recognise, manage, and work with the 'emotional turbulence' that can arise in the field' (Butcher, 2022). While I discuss the various methods used within the case studies themselves, I will highlight the main methodologies used and make a case for why and how they were applied.

Autoethnography

'The personal is not autobiographical. The personal is generic' (Berlant, 2011).

To begin, I want to express my positionality as a researcher, and how that eventually developed into an autoethnographic approach in some parts of the thesis, along with the use of sensorial methods of observing the sights, sounds, smells, and taste in chapter 3 on Southall. My initial research design was solely focused on the experiences and stories of my participants. However, as my field work was approved, we had gone into a national lockdown which halted much of my work, particularly in engaging with potential participants. We were required to stay at 'home', and as a recent immigrant to London, the feeling of 'home' and this research took on a heightened meaning. As I expand on in future chapters, I have grown up across seven countries, and my interest in this topic of belonging and identity has long been a personal preoccupation. As Brah highlights of her own writing, 'I interrogate my own political biography because it is so closely tied up with my intellectual labour' (Brah, 1996). The experience of my research and day to day life – securing housing, being an international student in a British institution, conducting research during a pandemic, spaces of exclusion/inclusion, my mobility – all these various encounters are themselves political.

Autoethnography is a tool to examine my position as a 'practice of critical reflection on the embodied experience of knowledge making' (Behl, 2017). 'Similarly for decades, feminist scholars have critically examined power relations between researchers and researched, and have found that power operates in shifting, contextual, and relational ways depending on the researcher's positionality (gender, race, class, sexuality, and other axes of social difference) with respect to the research participants' (Behl, 2017). Therefore, what I bring to this research and my engagement with the participants itself is political and the site of these encounters are relevant to the findings.

The form of autoethnography I use is a mix of personal stories where my subjective self becomes a 'salient part of the research process, and sociohistorical implications' of my experiences are reflected upon 'to study the social world from the perspective of the interacting individual' (Spry, 2023). Belonging to the South Asian diaspora that I research, my background has influenced the research – especially in noting how my perspectives have been challenged and changed over the course of this project. To draw attention to my positionality is to critically engage with and reflect on my diasporic identity as part of my research on diasporas. Performing autoethnography is not to simply include myself within the narratives of others or the theories I utilise to discuss belonging. I challenge the assumption that such personal narratives as 'unscholarly', where 'translating the lived intersections of self, other, time, and space into autoethnographic performance has allowed me to integrate my personal, professional, and political voice'(ibid). Particularly in examining the everyday, it is not just the noteworthy events, policies, or figures but the seemingly mundane day to day activities that can be political, felt by any one person, including myself, in the diaspora I study.

I also adopt autoethnography as a tool to further the ambivalence I emphasise throughout the thesis. Ambivalence, as I'll flesh out in detail in subsequent chapters, accounts for opposing and conflicting positions to exist simultaneously. Ambivalence makes space for discussions – to work through the nuances and conflict of feelings and experiences. Therefore, I aim to contribute to the research by closing the gap between 'researcher' and 'researched' and accentuate the intellectual and emotional ambivalence of belonging. In this liminal space of 'researcher' and 'researched', I am also mindful of the power structures within this study. While I belong to the community I research, I do not have any benefit of reputation nor existing connections as I started my research as a recent migrant to the country. The many identities I hold – student, immigrant, female, researcher, linguistic fluency in Hindi and Punjabi, Indian passport holder, middle-class, heterosexual, millennial, able-bodied, physically non-religious (and more) – have an impact on how participants perceive me and respond to my questions. Utilising autoethnography allows me to describe in detail my experience with my participants, in specific spaces, and reflect on how my positionality grants, restricts, or affects my mobility, allows, or prevents me from hearing some stories. In incorporating these observations, I hope to act as an 'active agent' in shaping the research and its findings.

<u>(Auto)ethnography</u>

Employing autoethnography as a self-reflexive approach also benefited my interviews and made an already personal experience of sharing food or interrogating the feelings of my participants position me alongside them. In many instances, participants would speak in Hindi/Punjabi or use cultural shorthand with words like '*andaza*', a feeling of how much spice to use or sharing experiences of understood gendered expectations. Given the intimacy of sharing a meal and the conversation of belonging, some interviewees would break the 'fourth wall' and were curious of my South Asian background. The 'fourth wall' here being the breakdown of a traditional researcher – research participant role, where I am not invisible but someone who is also part of the South Asian diaspora. The conversation becomes a participatory method and autoethnography becomes a useful method where I 'engage in a shared conversation… not for, but with the community' (ibid). Some dialogues with participants felt as if my two identities – as a South Asian and a woman – were being confirmed to build trust and to assess how I would handle their stories.

Researching one's own community is not straightforward, nor do I wish to assert there are only benefits in this type of field work. Being an 'insider' can often mean existing in a paradox, where my biases or preconceptions can colour the experiences and stories of others. Similarly, there is a danger in making assumptions or jumping to conclusions because the experiences might feel *known*. For example, in discussing gender relations in South Asian cultures, some participants would end with 'you know how *it* is', without going into greater detail unless pushed because they assumed I could fill in the blanks. The hesitation to fill in the blank could also be seen as the explanation is almost too intimate to verbalise – this becomes a useful observation in itself. For example, when the scholar KV refers to a 'handsy uncle', she does not explain this any further verbally, but uses her gaze and expression so I can infer her meaning.

In some instances, the participatory method of eating together that breaks the fourth wall was helping in building rapport with the participants – after all, I am asking them to share their vulnerability. However, at times, the balancing act of 'researcher' and 'researched' became a challenge for this very reason. It is through (auto)ethnography that I hope to overcome this by reflecting on my own position within the interviews I conducted. As is often the case with diaspora, there is a danger in flattening narratives or assuming a single story of 'the' South Asian woman. In the same way ambivalence allows for dialogue to make sense of differing positions, the experience of not only myself and my participants, but the difference amongst participants themselves, provides a space for me to more critically engage with how and why experiences of belonging are different or when might they be similar.

Belonging, which will be repeated a number of times across this thesis, is a particularly difficult emotion to 'articulate and interpret that which is only experienced internally, physically and/or psychologically' (Butcher, 2022). People's narratives can be overlapping, conflicting, nostalgic, and therefore ambivalent. Importantly, in any conversation of everyday life, we have to recognise that 'political economy is necessarily a space of feelings, moods, atmospheres, attachments…' where discussing narratives means shrinking 'a gap between the personal and the political, between the structural and the embodied' (Anderson *et al.*, 2023).

Therefore, my role is to try and find patterns and connections to conceptualise their experiences. I am also both an insider and outsider, not only because I have not lived their experience, but most of my participants were either born in the UK or have lived here for much longer than I have – their relationship to a 'British' identity is unique and personal. Belonging to the South Asian diaspora does not make me a complete insider, which means I am left oscillating between positions as a researcher where 'holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group' (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Importantly, it is not simply about the binaries of 'insider' and 'outsider', which furthers the argument I hope to make in my research itself – after all, who defines the parameters of being British Asian? The 'hyphen' of insider and outsider 'acts as a third space, a space between, a space of paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence, as well as conjunction and disjunction' (ibid). Occupying the space 'in-between' mirrors a lot of what this research is about, arguing that this position allows for a more nuanced and rich discussion of what it means to belong.

Sensorial Methods - Walking

'You only have to walk through the streets of south-east London to feel its paradoxes' (Bates and Rhys-Taylor, 2017). I'd argue this is the case for many streets in London, including the neighbourhoods where I conducted my research. Les Back argues, 'walking is not just a technique for uncovering the mysteries of the city but also a form of pedagogy or a way to learn and think not just individually but also collectively' (ibid). For my walks through Southall, I took notes, pictures, and my analysis drew on the repeated walks and observations I recorded and eventually coded thematically.

As part of this (auto)ethnography, walking through the city, especially in Southall, was a crucial way of exploring and feeling this part of London. Southall feels like it tells a story of London that is different from the generic image of London – Southall in Zone 4 sits in contrast to the centre of the city. This research looks at space and place of diaspora, of how neighbourhoods are shaped by their history and informed by the everyday practices of community – walks through this neighbourhood are not only about the formation and use of space but also of time. Walking through the high street of Southall, engaging with people on the streets, and observing signs of a 'post-colonial' London built in large part by those colonised and profoundly impacted by the British Empire, allows me to shape the narrative of struggle, anti-racist solidarities, and the everyday life of those living in the community today. In conducting research, the very act of interviewing or participating in a group meeting as I did in Southall, disrupts the investigation of 'everyday' as, on an ordinary day, not many are made to discuss their opinions and experiences of belonging. Walking through the streets gave me a sense of the everyday space and place, and by extension the community, to situate how the neighbourhood has a geography for the South Asian diaspora. In these walks, the landscape becomes what 'de Certeau calls 'space' i.e., where knowledge of a specific place is assembled, historicised and situated' (Certeau and Certeau, 2013).

As Back warns in his own writing of Southeast London, there are many ways to interpret and paths to walk, with no one singular story of what makes a place – what de Certeau would call the 'a space of enunciation' – the detours and my chosen path would differ from other pedestrians on this road, especially those who live in this neighbourhood. In this regard, I use

autoethnography again to emphasise the experience I, personally, am having in relation to the sights, sounds, and smells I come across. 'In street walking whole systems of meaning and patterns of culture come to life and take shape' (Mauss 1979, cited in ibid) and it is through my walk that I look for signs of history, stories, memories through somatic observation.

> Places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in preserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolizations encrusted in the pain or pleasure of the body. 'I feel good here'(Certeau and Certeau, 2013).

Conducting fieldwork on foot is attempting to uncover what deposits are made to a place, especially in understanding the pain and pleasure of the body – in acts of resistance where signs around Southall show solidarity towards the Farmer's Protest in India to organising campaigns opposing new development in the neighbourhood. And in moments of pleasure where the streets offer chai and jalebi. While de Certeau and geographers like Tovi Fenster think of such walks as an accumulation of knowledge and memory, I come to this neighbourhood as an outsider. I decided to include walking in Southall as part of the research design after my initial visit. During my first walk, I recognised how social the visit felt even if I were doing it alone. I engaged with people working in restaurants, supermarkets, and food stalls. I noticed that there were more men on the streets than women and I was curious to make sense of what was happening organically to my senses. 'Walking collects together visions, smells, tactilities, sounds and tastes with various degrees of association and intimacy and with 'synaesthetic effects' (Tilley, 2022). In the chapter on Southall, I write about the sights, for example, as a marker of South Asian identity, where I make connections to a sense of cultural commodification of what identity and belonging means. Walking through Southall allows for such connections to be tangible in this research.

Sensorial Methods – Eating

Research on food presents a great opportunity to eat. Throughout the research, I am adamant about thinking of 'food' as a departure point for many aspects of identity, nationality, gendered labour, nostalgia, and more but the sensorial look at food pays attention to the sight, smell, taste, and sound of cooking and eating – which are integral to food itself, and the diaspora. Race, as Anita Mannur writes, 'is not merely a problem of visuality but one that stems from bodily inscriptions of otherness' (Mannur, 2022). In researching the belonging of a racialised community of London through food, the sensorial exploration of smells, sounds, taste, allows for a more detailed understanding of 'encounters with difference' (ibid). Eating in this research takes place alone, with participants, and in groups.

Eating Alone in Southall

Walking in Southall was accompanied by eating at the food stalls around the high street, which gave me the opportunity to dwell in the space – as Heidegger and Mannur have claimed, 'to dwell is to experience home without feeling unmoored' (ibid), and eating in Southall, alone, was creating space for me to dwell about memories of previous homes. Not only is the neighbourhood full of stimuli of South Asian heritage and history, but the visuals, smells and sounds are accentuated by the ample food places. These 'senses' do not exist in

isolation but interact and inform an experience of nostalgia that was vital in conceptualising diasporic space and memory of place. Eating also situates the experience you are having, while the nostalgia of food moves me across time and space, as dwelling means that 'one is both in place and in movement. In this case, the body might be in apparent stasis, moored and in place, while the mind is free to travel' (ibid). For example, eating fresh jalebis is reminiscent of food stalls in India, in my childhood – the experience of the smells and taste transformed the public space around me in Southall to configure a space of the past. Eating alone in Southall was remarkably different than it would be in India – for a few reasons but mostly because I would not be eating alone but with my parents – however, recognising the difference in sociality and public offer a space for analysing what 'home' means for the South Asian diaspora living elsewhere. The Southall chapter also critically analyses street food and what Krishnendu Ray calls the 'global hierarchy of taste' – using the experience of eating alone in Southall, I am not only employing an (auto)ethnography of diasporic place, but also critiquing the use of 'taste' as a marker of authority and power (Ray, 2016).

The space in which the diaspora cooks and consumes food on the street provides a different perspective from how food is prepared in homes or eaten in restaurants. 'Eating is contingent on socioeconomic status, race, and gender. Whom we eat with, how we eat, and how these rituals are imagined are important, particularly in works that consciously rework how we think about the connection among eating, intimacy, and the public' (Mannur, 2022). Eating out in Southall provides a chance to reflect on such considerations of class, gentrification, kinship, gender from the perspective of places that are 'public'. Accessing such public spaces of eating gave me an opportunity to observe how people interact with one another, while existing outside the centre of London, and how Southall acts as a 'third space' – a hybrid space that performs a more complex amalgamation of two cultures but creates its own unique culinary and diasporic experience (Bhabha, 1994). Southall and East Ham are places of interest because of how South Asian food is often perceived – 'through its extremities of being too hot, too oily, too spicy, too pungent – also constantly has to negotiate the terms under which it is presented and consumed among its publics' (Mannur, 2022).

Eating Together – Commensality in Interviews

As I outlined in the introduction, this research is about people, places, and food. Eating together, therefore, is central to understanding how these intersect – after all, 'anthropological work has produced a broad consensus that food is about commensality – eating to make friends…' (Sutton, 2001). I conducted three interviews at a restaurant, participated in a supper club hosted by one of the chefs, and shared snacks over tea with the Southall Black Sisters meeting group. Commensality, the act of eating together, goes beyond the food itself and is a process that is all together more dynamic. During the lockdown, I managed to conduct some interviews over Zoom, however none of which made it to the final project. The theoretical conversations about food did not illuminate experiences that surround food as clearly as sharing a meal with participants managed to. Additionally, commentary on space and place were limited as we were not meeting at a restaurant or any specific neighbourhood. While the online conversations (besides the interview with chef A) are absent, they

nonetheless helped shape the interviews that took place once lockdown restrictions were lifted.

Inspired loosely by Elaine Swan and Rick Flowers' research on the Welcome Dinner Project – a project which invites people new to Australia to dine with an established community, the intention is to 'build trust, belonging and connection between people… as we share food and stories'.[6] Riffing off this practice of commensal hospitality, I decided to move away from the traditional interview route and attempt a more experiential and relational method of conducting fieldwork. While I have previously suggested that interviews on the everyday experience does require us to, objectively, break from the 'everyday', the act of eating is certainly a routine that is part of our daily lives. Food, as established, is a multi-sensorial experience that also communicates identities, choices, rituals – embodied and symbolic – that can be better observed and understood through the act of commensality. In the Project, there is an encounter of the 'other' that is mediated through food and sharing stories. In my research, I am adapting this idea by leaning on the dimensions of commensality that shape 'the affective encounter in such food experimentations: the social setting, materiality of consumption spaces, social rituals, the food itself and wider political context' (Flowers and Swan, 2017). In my meals with participants, I am not just learning about the participant but also of the restaurant they have selected – if the chosen restaurant is a place they frequent, what they order, the people they normally eat with, the neighbourhood it is in, the decor, the people that are eating around us – all these contribute to creating the individual context and 'mediate the extent to which people respond and are transformed through encounters with racial and cultural difference' (ibid).

The interviews at restaurants with participants AC, EG, and chef B varied in length and location. While I had met AC and EG briefly before and scheduled our interview, I was meeting chef B for the first time. The participants picked restaurants they were familiar with or had previously ordered from. Before the interview began, I had explained my ethics approval from the university and requested their consent to use a recording device placed next to them. I later transcribed the interview and coded the data, organising their responses and observations into themes that later informed their respective case studies.

The Interviews

My interview with chef A was the only interview that was conducted online, via Zoom, to accommodate her busy schedule as she was promoting her upcoming cookbook. The interview, with permission, was recorded and later transcribed and coded to inform the chapter 'Eating with Professionals'.

At the restaurant, the semi-structured interview had no formal script, with some prepared questions, along with improvised follow-up questions. The generally informal and conversational approach allowed for an organic conversation that was tangential, but with purpose. The setting of a restaurant meant we were in a public-yet-private setting, with the expected interruptions of the servers and, of course, eating and discussing the food itself.

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[6] *About us: The welcome dinner project* (2018) *The Welcome Dinner Project | Building connections that bring change*. Available at: https://welcomedinnerproject.org/about-us (Accessed: 26 July 2023).

Eating follows a 'predictable ritual stage – processes of commensality – which transition people from the outside world to the commensal event' (Flowers and Swan, 2017), which includes moments of small talk and debating what food to order. While there were moments that would break the 'fourth wall', the focus remained the participant and how they recalled, articulated, and analysed their experiences. Eating also provided helpful breaks and pauses to allow the participant to reflect and the chance to make observations of the setting.

The restaurant interviews gave us a unique opportunity not only to indulge in food but learn of our 'insider' and 'outsider' differences and similarities as part of the South Asian diaspora. The 'hyphen' I referred to earlier, and the 'third space' that we occupied, was useful in the performance of commensality and conviviality. There were some food items that were familiar and/or unfamiliar to both the participant and me that created space for a more in-depth conversation of food and the places we relate certain foodstuffs to. Our immediate surroundings also informed our conversation – either the participants would share their thoughts on fellow diners or the kind of clientele the restaurant usually attracts (within the diaspora or 'outside'), along with engaging with the staff. For example, in my interview with chef B, the restaurant chef asked about our spice tolerance, which led to a conversation on 'authenticity', which is a recurring theme in the research. There were other moments of misunderstanding with the servers and language barriers – all of which were useful insights to the project. The setting encouraged a conversation that did not always have to centre belonging, but remained pertinent to the topic nonetheless, where food was a 'fulcrum' in these conversations (Flowers and Swan, 2017). As Flowers and Swan argue, 'whilst everyday multiculturalism is not designed, planned or facilities as intercultural pedagogies', the practice of commensality can produce a connection – however temporary – over 'collective sharing of food, stories, and feelings' (ibid).

Eating together also provided an alternative observation beyond the stories themselves, but through nonverbal communication. This was particularly important for my observations during chef B's supper club, where commensality was the feature of the evening. In this regard, sharing time and space with other diners who were (presumably) equally engaged in dinner with a narrative. The supper club provided a unique experience of eating alone while eating together – while I was dining with several people, I was also experiencing an intimate moment, almost paradoxical to the design of the supper club. This was in part due to sharing a table with strangers and dwelling in moments of silence. Such nonverbal moments captured the insider/outsider position of my research.

My interview with Southall Black Sisters took place shortly after Covid-19 lockdown. It was also the first interview I had conducted as part of this research. I had contacted SBS through their website in 2020 and received a response from one of the SBS managers who then arranged a phone call for us to discuss my research. During our call, I explained my research questions, and introduced myself as a South Asian researcher. Knowing the reputation of SBS and the sensitivity of their work, I asked if and how it would be possible for to write about their organisation as it pertains to my research. Initially, I asked if it would be possible for someone from SBS to share their experience and if there was any likelihood of speaking with someone they support. As I outline in the chapter on Southall, to write about Southall is

to engage with SBS as the organisation is pivotal in the neighbourhood. I wanted to understand what spaces were available to women and to explore the role of solidarity and networks in theorising belonging. SBS offers regular check-ins and the manager I spoke to suggested I could participate in one such support group meeting. I was told I could observe and ask questions during the meeting. In preparing for the interview, I was warned to simplify my questions, and made aware of potential language barriers. I worked alongside an SBS staff member to come up with some generic questions, including –

- How long have you lived in London?
- What does your everyday routine look like?
- What made you seek SBS?
- What do you cook? Do you eat out?
- Where do you shop for groceries?
- Do you feel like you have a sense of community in London? What does this community look like?
- Do you feel excluded from places in London?
- What support, if any, do you receive from the government?
- What are some of the day-to-day challenges you face?
- What does 'belonging' mean to you?
- What does your identity mean to you?

Their usual meeting lasts two hours and I was given a strict hour to conduct my interview. I was not able to hold any one-on-one meetings. Before the meeting began, the facilitator shared consent forms with the participants and later scanned and emailed me the signed forms. For confidentiality and safety reasons, I was not able to request further interviews with the participants. As I'll explain in the chapter itself, much of our conversation circulated safety, belonging, and identity without as much conversation on food as we eventually ran out of time. However, the interview illuminated a valuable insight which resulted in reframing the main research question of this study. Earlier in this chapter, I describe how I repositioned the inquiry of this research from how to improve belonging to why belonging persists. This redirection came directly from the interview with SBS, where belonging wasn't 'obtained' overtime, but described in moments, spaces, and unbelonging was always part of the conversation.

While the majority of this research rests on the use of food as a way to explore reimagining belonging, I have included my conversations with support group as an important understanding of differences within the South Asian diaspora. Food, as I'll conclude, is a practice that can make space for belonging. However, food is not without its own power struggle. SBS participants, for example, can practice their belonging within the safe space of a support group over chai and samosa, but their use of food in their articulation of belonging and identity is in stark contrast to the chefs in this study who have made food their business and their means of engaging with heritage. Again, there is no one way to experience or articulate belonging. The participants at SBS allow for a deeper understanding of differences within the experiences of belonging.

There were only a few necessary criteria for potential participants – women, over the age of 18, who identified as part of the South Asian diaspora and lived in London. The participants, however, varied amongst their many other identities – differing in age, background, hometowns, class, education, place of birth, and how long they have lived in the UK, and more.

Having started the fieldwork in the midst of a pandemic, there were some built-in limitations – I was initially only able to engage with women or organisations who were likely to have internet access and importantly, time – with caring responsibilities and other ripple effects of the pandemic, I was requesting not only their time but also a space in which they were mentally prepared to engage in dialogue about their sense of belonging and feelings of home. I organised interviews with AC and EG after a chance meeting and striking up conversation about our shared heritage. My interviews with both chefs were organised through email after I had read an article on supper clubs. All the interviews drawn on in this thesis took place once the lockdown restrictions had been lifted.

While those I interacted with for this research are not members of vulnerable populations, the topic of conversation for this project touches on trauma, pain, and violence. Such feelings are layered with the realities of intersecting identities, which is more distinct in my focus group organised by Southall Black Sisters. This focus group included women who have a precarious status within the country. Many have pending cases with the Home Office and unpredictable timelines for further proceedings. The focus group was co-facilitated by a member of Southall Black Sisters, who also received a copy of the participants' signed consent forms for their records. Collaborating with SBS ensured we mitigated any risks or concerns and upheld the privacy and safety of the focus group participants.

Limitations

The pandemic presented challenges and limitations that condensed the time I would have otherwise had to carry out my fieldwork. As mentioned above, I was limited in who I could have contact with, and the neighbourhoods I was hoping to cover. Similarly, the demographic I engaged with is likely (although not explicitly confirmed prior to interviews) to be interested in the subject of belonging.

I have tried to express my positionality as clearly as possible throughout the thesis. However, there is likely to be bias that I have overlooked or only recognised post-interview during my analysis. For example, certain themes I had predicted would have a greater significance did not feature heavily in my findings. Religion, sexuality, and disabilities are three such themes that are detailed elsewhere in literature on belonging, however, were not discussed by the participants nor emphasised in my questions. While participants would refer to any one of these themes, they did not focus on such identities (and others) in their responses. Given my positionality in the research, I am not visibly religious nor have any visible disability. It is a likelihood that my appearance or mannerisms may have had an impact how the participants chose to respond. While religion certainly has a meaningful role in food customs, especially

in South Asian culture, it remains one of the underdeveloped themes within the thesis. Similarly, I have engaged only with women for this research and discussed at length the role of gender in their sense of belonging. However, this did not expand to much conversation on gender identity or sexuality and there is growing literature that deals with the queer and heteronormative understandings of identity and belonging that are also underdeveloped in this thesis. Nonetheless, the literature and critical engagement employed in the thesis relies on the work and teachings of queer, feminist, anti-racist and anti-colonial scholars.

My interview with SBS and their participants also presented several limitations. Some I have highlighted above, including the time limit, which meant there was not enough time to discuss food further. Additionally, I was not able to secure any one-on-one interviews as SBS is extremely cautious of safeguarding their participants. As I've mentioned above, my presence and the interview nature itself detaches a sense of everyday-ness when attempting to record and report on everyday life. However, there are also deeper power hierarchies present between me and the participants of SBS. I am taking space in their normal monthly meetings, and I have a privilege that many of these participants did not – a safety of a visa, and more. To mitigate this as best as possible, I remained as transparent about my research questions, how their answers would be recorded and used, and where necessary in the chapter, have written observations within the room to depict as clearly how people choose to react, respond, or remain silent to questions.

Scholarship on belonging is vast and encompasses many fields from geography, sociology, psychology, politics and more. I consider this project in the field of political sociology. However, there are themes, such as the ones identified above, that could not be analysed in detail due to time and scope of research. While I have presented a brief overview of literature on the various themes and theories I touch upon, I wanted to focus on how previous scholarship challenge, support, or move forward the participants' stories and analyses within the case studies themselves. This allowed for space to develop themes that were pertinent and consistent throughout my findings – detailing diaspora, ambivalence, and cruel optimism in lieu of providing extensive literature on citizenship, political participation, and other defined forms through which belonging has been studied and well-covered by scholars in the field. I also made this choice to challenge the common conceptions of contemporary belonging as my argument seeks to unpack belonging and question its purpose and persistence in the lives of the women I interviewed. The desire to belong is recognised as a strong urge to overcome feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and displacement. Borders are not fixed, and the 'very development of the nation-state occurred, in part, to control mobility along the axis of the nation/race' (Walia, Kelley and Estes, 2021). Therefore, this thesis explores belonging beyond what national borders alone might suggest. This is not to challenge nor undermine the political realities of citizenship as strong dictators of belonging; however, I aim to record the contemporary and everyday experiences that are shaped by borders and nationality through the lens of diaspora, their food, and their ambivalence towards where they belong, and how they experience it.

Chapter Outlines

As demonstrated in the research story, this thesis is a qualitative exploration of belonging through food. How do women of the South Asian diaspora in London articulate, perform, and express their desire for belonging? In this introduction, I situated the research and the four years of its study against the changing political and social climates that have impacted the participants and therefore, the findings. This chapter also included the methodology and participation information. I made a case for the qualitative methods employed by way of emotionally engaged research through one-on-one interviews at restaurants, a visit to a supper club, and an autoethnographic sensorial walk-through Southall. I described the recruitment criteria and process for the participants, along with relevant demographic information. This chapter examined the potential limitations of the research, and I reflected on my positionality within the research.

Chapter 2 engages with scholarship on the Politics of Belonging, South Asian diaspora, and Cruel Optimism. This chapter serves as the literature review and foundation to the case studies where I expand on the theories and scholarship to further the participants narratives. As all the participants of this research are of South Asian heritage, this chapter also contends with the making of a diaspora, power relations within and 'outside' of a diaspora. I introduce key literature on ambivalence and cruel optimism, which is dispersed throughout the thesis. This chapter reflects on diaspora as a position of empowerment and/or marginalisation, and the role of food of a diaspora. This chapter serves as a reference point for how we begin to understand the role of belonging for the South Asian community in London.

In **Chapter 3**, I present the first case study of the ethnographic field work. A look at place and space – a restaurant and a neighbourhood, and how contemporary belonging is understood and articulated by my participants. These lunchtime conversations critique the separation of 'politics' and 'cultural' belonging, recognising the way that the two participants, EG and AC, have formed, reformed, and shaped their identity as a result of both a political and cultural understanding of belonging. Food, in this instance, becomes a marker for such a fluid identity through which both participants can explore their heritage, practice an identity, relive a memory, and importantly, move within their contemporary space. This chapter brings together politics, sociology, geography, and food writing to provide a background for EG and AC to explain what belonging means to them. East Ham and the chosen restaurants become an important site and physical repository of memory, a way to challenge stereotypes and past experiences, to demonstrate how food and place are inextricably linked to the past but are powerful characters in political and cultural belonging now and in the future.

Chapter 4 is divided into two parts. Southall is an important site for many British Asians – a place of home and a place of struggle. This chapter begins with a sensorial exploration of the space itself. A 'sensory' look through sight, smell, sound, feel and taste of the Southall High Street, street food vendors, and the South Asian identity. The first section of this chapter is autoethnographic where I, as a South Asian researcher, pay attention to the everyday sensorial experience of this popular neighbourhood and what it reveals about its history, food

practices, and cultural exchanges. This section confronts nostalgia and questions how diaspora is made in Southall.

The second section looks at a longstanding institution in Southall, Southall Black Sisters (SBS), a non-profit organisation that has been defending rights, organising advocacy efforts, and providing necessary services for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic women since 1979. In partnership with SBS, I conducted a focus group with 18 women who use their services. In this section, I highlight the experiences of these women and what their belonging looks like against a backdrop of domestic abuse, a precarious status (legal and social) within the British State, and the community found at SBS. It is through these emotional connections formed through space that political resistance starts to take shape. In this chapter, I once again confront the separation of the politics of belonging and cultural belonging to demonstrate how belonging can be unfixed, a performance, a desire, an achievement, a mundane act, and importantly, how ambivalence towards belonging evolves in time.

In the final case study, **Chapter 5**, I present a more in-depth look at food and the food industry from the perspective of two chefs. Food, as the previous chapters hopefully have confirmed, is more than a combination of ingredients on a plate. What surrounds the meal is equally complex and important – from the space of a restaurant to the server, and the chef that prepares it, the ingredients and the recipes are not static. In this chapter, I am eating 'professionally' with two South Asian chefs who have removed 'passive' eating and invited their diners to engage with them fully through the food they serve. In this section, I connect food and the person preparing it by looking at complex themes of authenticity, heritage, gender and place-making, and the act of commensality to explore belonging. This chapter reflects on the chefs that use food as malleable and physical representation of colonial history, gendered relations, and the possibility of new recipes and therefore identities. This chapter builds on the research findings of the previous case studies and interviews to demonstrate how food can be an active response to the messy creation of identity and an important practice of belonging.

In my conclusion, **Chapter 6**, I think of how we can reimagine belonging. In the research, I reflect on bell hooks' concept of 'margins' as a site of resistance, where I see spaces like Southall and East Ham as two neighbourhoods of this physical representation of marginality, and South Asian food as a departure from the typical 'hierarchy of taste'. However, as much of the conversation of belonging, cuisine, and borders, relies on the idea that these things are not static and shifting, it is the feeling of 'in-between' that informs the experience of ambivalence. Literature on diaspora and the responses of participants often ruminate on the experience of being 'in-between'. Berlant asks, 'what it feels like to be in the middle of a shift', and suggests the impasse can be seen as an opportunity to 'climb in and look around'(Anderson *et al.*, 2023). It is from the 'in-between', the 'margin', the 'other' position that I intend to explore the ambivalence of belonging.

2 Literature Review – On Politics of Belonging, Diaspora, Food and Cruel Optimism

As this thesis is about people, place, and food, their meaning is parsed through scholarship on and understanding of belonging, diaspora, food and cruel optimism. In this chapter, I introduce the key themes and theories that set the foundation for the upcoming case studies. In those chapters, I refer back to scholars and claims detailed here to demonstrate how the participants experience or articulate belonging, whatever it means to them, in their day to day.

Belonging and the Politics of Belonging

Nira Yuval-Davis contends belonging and the politics of belonging behave separately, where belonging 'tends to be naturalised, and becomes articulated and politicised only when it is threatened in some way' (Yuval-Davis, 2011). She argues belonging is constructed by various political projects – citizenship being first and foremost, raising questions of rights and entitlements. This thesis does not attempt to summarise the literature but identify the major fundamental themes that circulate in contemporary and everyday conversations about belonging. Importantly, I do not delve into citizenship as a form of belonging as this is well documented through Yuval-Davis' and other scholars such as Devyani Prabhat's writing. Although, these legal realities will certainly continue to play a role in theorising belonging throughout the thesis. Instead, I am focusing on the 'everyday' to distinguish belonging from the politics of belonging as a discipline to understand how belonging may be articulated and practised by the participants. In addition to unpacking belonging, I want to consider why and how food may serve as an anchor for emotional belonging, and why it is not without the political influences and forces, as food itself is a political activity. To do so, this section is divided into two parts – the first explores 'belonging' and the second will critically examine the politics of belonging, making a case for how we need to reimagine belonging as a subject informed by the everyday practices of belonging.

<u>Belonging – The Word</u>

Belonging, at first glance, can be seen as a positive word, imbued with several other meanings – membership, acceptance, safety – a large part of our emotional needs as humans. Social scientists argue 'to belong is to matter' and our belonging provides 'a sense of purpose to make sense of our experiences' (Lambert *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, theorists suggest that 'the sense of having a meaningful life depends, at least in part, on a sense of belonging' (ibid). In psychosocial studies, there is a focus on intimate relationships, relationships that fit part of a larger symbolic group such as family, community, or a nation that 'transcends the limitations of their own body and expands the capacities and boundaries of their own self' (Aron & Norman, 2001 cited in Lambert *et al.*, 2013). Other theorists offer the importance of narrative in defining our belonging not just to others but to ourselves, confirming a self-interrogation into how we might sense our belonging to fit into a system or community. This narrative of self-identification, as Yuval-Davis posits, can take shape in many forms which

are, 'contested or transient. Even in its most stable primordial forms, however, belonging is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity, which is only a naturalised construction of a particular hegemonic form of power relations' (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Therefore, these narratives are a means of negotiation with many processes that act and inform our sense of belonging. These narratives are likely to be context dependent and change over time.

In Chapter 3, in East Ham, I consider the experiences of participants AC and EG to understand how they articulate their belonging and the processes by which their narratives are shaped. Both participants discuss their identity within the South Asian diaspora but have different ways of attaching themselves to the South Asian community or label. However, it is their positionality and everyday life in London that highlights their differing perspectives and everyday experience. As Keenan writes, '*where* subjects can be, also affect *who* they can be' (Keenan, 2015), demonstrating the lived reality of how the participants not only attach meaning to but are, themselves, informed by place. There are many 'places' that are meaningful and a source of attachment. However, for the purpose of our conversation, place will be identified within the context and refers to country, city, neighbourhood, and/or restaurant where most of the interviews take place.

In order to critically examine the scholarship in relation to the participants comments on belonging, I want to begin with understanding the impact '*politics*' has on 'belonging'. To this end, I investigate how belonging functions as a political process – this exploration of belonging *plus* politics is heavily influenced by Sara Ahmed and her work on diversity. While much of the diversity Ahmed probes is within higher education and workplace institutions, I see belonging to a political community, as it is understood in popular scholarship, where the state becomes the institution – granting rights and managing who is included or excluded. Therefore, how does the desire, longing, or persistence of belonging change with the prefix of politics?

I use Ahmed's insight and follow Yuval-Davis's framework of 'ethical and political values,' where construction of belonging defines where the imaginary boundary line *should* be drawn to critique the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Again, there are a number of anti-racist, feminist, anti-colonial theorists who have critiqued and offered alternative ways of understanding citizenship and entitlements but for our purposes, inclusion and exclusion from a political community is imbued with ethics and the question of how the project of politics of belonging *ought* to foster a sense of belonging as a good democratic practice. This understanding also relies on Sarah Keenan's work, *Subversive Property; Law and the production of spaces of belonging,* where she argues 'how spaces of belonging are maintained…(that) helps keep old networks of belonging in place' (Keenan, 2015). The political project of belonging simultaneously creates boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. This is under the guise of 'good democratic politics', yet 'who is a stranger is continually being modified and contested' (ibid). In this constant evolution of who the state favours becomes the basis of the cruel project. Therefore, striving for political inclusion is not only a desire to be acknowledged by the state, but a relentless process whereby migrants, minorities, women, members of LGBTQ+ communities, asylum seekers, refugees, and more long for a stable relationship with the state on a promise for rights that they may never achieve (ibid). I

challenge this understanding of the politics of belonging by looking at the concept of cruel optimism later in this chapter. I forward our normative understanding of political belonging by also highlighting the stories of participants in this research who, from their unique positionality, practice belonging in the everyday act of eating, sharing, and preparing food despite threats to and boundaries against their belonging. By reimagining the active practice of one's own belonging, as defined by them, I argue there is resistance that can produce a 'counter-space' of belonging.

<u>Belonging – A Positive Politics?</u>

Politics, much like belonging, can be defined in many ways – a series of governance, activities that organise a population, a relationship of power amongst state and people, and a means of decision-making. Early in this thesis, I simplified the research into three main themes – people, place, and food. Politics is an organised response that directly impacts people, place, and food in everyday life. Migration, cosmopolitanism, conviviality, and multiculturalism represent a political philosophy pertinent to this research and are theories that have been heavily criticised by scholars as either too Eurocentric, normative, or purely descriptive.

Short of derailing this research by summarising these concepts and how they coincide with belonging, I want to highlight the concept of multiculturalism by discussing Stuart Hall's 'Multicultural Question'. If diaspora, as I'll argue later in this chapter, is in opposition to the nation-state, Hall uses multiculturalism to question 'whether it is possible for groups of people from different cultural, religious, linguistic, historical backgrounds to occupy the same social space' (Hall, cited in Yuval-Davis, Kannabiran and Vieten, 2006). The diasporic tension between attachments to cultural roots 'back home', and new attachments in the current space is reflected in Hall's question, where he also considers 'the terms on which they (the diaspora) can live with one another without either group (the less powerful group) having to become the imitative version of the dominant one – i.e. an assimilation, or on the other hand, the two groups hating one another, or projecting images of degradation' (ibid). In Chapter 4, Southall, I expand on the encounter between the coloniser and the colonised and the role of mimicry, or the 'imitative version' when occupying the same space. As I will demonstrate in detail, this interaction is a complex and ambivalent response to the power and social relations that are present in a given place.

To further the multicultural question, Hall asks 'how can people live together in difference?' I use this to put forward how can and do people articulate their belonging in this context of the multicultural every day. The multicultural question is a composite of a series of questions, where I echo Anthias' approach which asks, 'under what conditions do people with different languages, cultures, and ways of life fail to live in harmony?' (Anthias, 2006). While there may be a number of ways to begin to answer this question, I want to emphasise the importance of the policies made and the influence it has from top-down, and how it interferes in the everyday. In September 2023, in a speech to right-wing think tanks in Washington D.C., former Home Secretary, Suella Braverman claimed multiculturalism 'has failed because it allowed people to come to our society and live parallel lives in it. They could be in

the society but not of the society'.[7] Many have felt her speech was reminiscent of Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech in 1968, who made a similar claim of 'parallel lives'. In the 1968 speech, Powell commented on the Sikh Community in England who 'maintain customs inappropriate to Britain' as a regret.[8] Those who hold this position believe divergence from 'the society' results in fragmentation of society. However, if we define multiculturalism as living with difference, it is not that multiculturalism has failed, but rather, the conditions created by policies and rhetoric that oppose 'living in harmony' which have failed.

Braverman, whose parents are of Indian origin, with Mauritian and Kenyan backgrounds, is considered a product of multiculturalism herself. Others point to the current Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, of Indian origin and of Hindu faith, as a sign of multiculturalism succeeding, not failing. However, these two narratives co-exist where one attempts to highlight the 'migration' problem is a lack of assimilation, while the other is a celebration of assimilation so fitting that the Conservative Party's anti-immigrant ideals are upheld by members of the South Asian diaspora such as Braverman and Sunak. Moreover, arguing that Braverman and Sunak are children of immigrants, therefore, a successful example of multiculturalism, fails to recognise not only who is empowered in the diaspora as will be discussed later in this chapter, but also the ideological positions they espouse have garnered them greater power and leadership within Conservative politics – a politics which has, again, focused on creating a hostile environment.

The politics of belonging, seemingly, becomes about integration and assimilation. Moreover, 'the implication underlying such calls is that changing the face of those 'in power' will, in itself, change the outcomes of institutional power, where anti-racism becomes little more than representation, inclusion, and diversity' (Bhattacharyya *et al.*, 2021). Belonging, again, cannot be reduced to a matter of inclusion or exclusion because this ignores the racist and hostile structural inequalities that uphold institutions of power, even if there is diasporic representation. These conditions reproduce threats to belonging, where top-down policies, and the everyday implications that perpetuate them, cannot be overcome by 'positing racism as a process of exclusion from sites of power and of public visibility…' (ibid). As Keenan points out these threats are not only produced but maintained by the system. What I aim to show here is the politics of belonging is often contradictory in nature – a cruel optimism whereby the desire to have a 'smooth fit' in a place means having to negotiate that 'place' (in this regard, the UK and specifically London) is where these racial, hostile, and structural inequalities are being produced.

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[7] Wingate, S. (2023) *Braverman: Multiculturalism has 'failed' and threatens security*, *The Independent*. Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/europe-home-secretary-united-states-multiculturalism-prime-minister-b2418911.html (Accessed: 27 September 2023).
[8] *Fifty Years On: Read enoch powell divisive rivers of blood speech* (2018) *Sky News*. Available at: https://news.sky.com/story/fifty-years-since-enoch-powells-rivers-of-blood-speech-11338513 (Accessed: 29 September 2023).

On Diaspora

As much of this thesis contends with place and diaspora, it is important to first look at the concept of diaspora. In the interviews, the participants share their stories of their own or their family's migration in a choreographed narrative that refers to both individual experiences and that of a community. This remainder of this chapter, therefore, provides a foundational understanding of the South Asian diaspora, where I aim to situate the participants' stories. This section does not provide an exhaustive account on the discourse surrounding diaspora; however, it seeks to highlight scholarship that furthers our understanding of the participants, what it means to refer to a community as a diaspora and the role of food as a symbol of diaspora. Understanding diaspora can inform us how shared histories impact political and everyday lives and how social locations and relations impact a sense of belonging.

As I'll refer to in later chapters, my interviews revealed a sense of belonging does not necessarily increase over time. In other words, the longer people have lived in the country does not guarantee a greater sense of belonging. Instead, throughout the interviews, belonging is articulated in moments. Understanding diaspora, however, is crucial in understanding the correlation between the politics and the emotional sense of belonging and the desire for a good life. In order to understand how belonging is affected, this chapter reviews how diaspora exists and evolves in the UK. Importantly, looking at how the South Asian diaspora developed in the UK also informs us how and why assimilation or inclusion as political belonging came to be and why it is must be challenged as a marker of 'good' politics.

Diasporas are 'placed in direct opposition to nation-state' (Ang, 2003). Diaspora refers to people who reside outside of their country of 'origin', which offers the potential of a transnational belonging beyond that of one nation-state. As participants in this research reflect, people belong to the South Asian diaspora in different ways – either they were migrants to the UK (or other countries prior to the UK) themselves, or their diasporic condition is a result of historical migration spanning generations, with varying degrees of attachment to South Asia or the UK. Diaspora, therefore, emits an image of fluidity and hybridity, while at the same time 'striving for connectedness, with and belonging, to the homeland' (Mavroudi, 2019). This tension is what carries a lot of the complexity and conversation on belonging forward. Diaspora is both an individual and collective experience – belonging 'to' a diaspora is an identity 'focused less on common territory and more on memory, or, more accurately, on the social dynamics of remembrance and commemoration' (Gilroy, 1994). Almost every participant refers to not only their individual or family experience, but that of the community and how they interact with others – in London or back 'home'. As Paul Gilroy suggests,

This historical rift between the location of residence and the location of belonging sets up another tension: between consciousness of diaspora-dispersal and affiliation and the distinctive modern structures and modes of power orchestrated by the institutional complexity of nation-states (ibid).

This tension is also part of what makes food and diaspora a compelling study in understanding the role of heritage, memory, and its relationship with food today – something that I will expand on in this section and in future chapters. Gilroy uses the word 'diaspora' in juxtaposition to 'fixity, rootedness and the sedentary', as an 'opposition to the political forms and codes of modern citizenship' (ibid). Historically a term reserved for the dispersion of Jewish people, the modification of the meaning of diaspora itself reflects the impact of globalisation and cultural hybridity – something aptly covered by Arjun Appadurai, which will be discussed shortly. Thinking beyond national borders and citizenship is what propels this research to exploring belonging in the everyday. While some of the participants in this research are British born, their heritage and identity are part of the South Asian diaspora in the UK, confusing this notion of 'origin' and autochthony.

Vijay Mishra describes the 'diasporic imaginary' as 'any ethnic enclave in a nation-state that defines itself, consciously, unconsciously or because of the political self-interest of a racialised nation-state, as a group that lives in displacement' (Mishra, 1996). Diaspora, therefore, is a political category, which confuses the separation of 'sense' of belonging and the 'politics' of belonging for those of South Asian heritage in the UK. Mishra uses 'imaginary' towards both nation and diaspora to suggest the narrative constructed is out of desire, and in particular, for diasporas, 'the fantasy of homeland' is a response to the feeling of rupture felt as a loss of their 'home'. Diaspora, therefore, contains within it a site of conflict – a site of emotional turmoil of trauma and loss, a positive identification of one's heritage, and a potential for transnational belonging, as well as un-belonging in the nation of residence. As Ien Ang writes, it is important to 'recognise the double-edgedness of diasporic identity: it can be a site of both support and oppression, emancipation and confinement, solidarity and division' (Ang, 2003). Diaspora is also not a 'spontaneous, primordial idea of kinship but depends on the active mobilisation of certain differences to articulate group identity' (13, Appadurai 1996a cited in Ang, 2003). To begin, we'll look at diaspora in relatively broad strokes before examining power relations that impact diaspora and belonging more specifically.

Complicating Diaspora – Origin, Residence, or a Third Space?

Diaspora, as it was initially conceived, dealt with exile, and entertained the possibility of return. Homi Bhabha considers the concept of home as having both an 'emergence and return'(Bhabha, 1994). While 'return' is never guaranteed, diasporas are likely to experience a tension between 'here' and 'there'. The feeling of in-betweenness, at times, demands a sense of closure of identity - to exist in the 'hybrid' identity is to reconcile with one identity being different and, at times, unable to assimilate to the others. George Orwell wrote on exile as a 'penalty of leaving your native land' means 'transferring your roots into shallower soil'(George, 1940). To understand the complexity of diaspora, therefore, is to reflect on these conflicting positions – it is neither here nor there, and it is exactly this 'non-place' that can create anxiety for a place.

Displacement can create anxiety and fear of a loss of identity. Anita Mannur explores Madhur Jaffrey's cookbook, *Invitation to Indian Cooking,* as an example of 'here' and 'there'

where Jaffrey's 'conscious attempts to fabricate authenticity are modulated by the anxiety to reproduce authenticity, while trying to create a sense of home and belonging in adopted homes and kitchens' (Mannur, 2009). Jaffrey had to construct a version of her 'India' as it is not a geography that is available to her in the immediate surroundings. A collection of recipes and stories becomes a way of expressing her connection to the 'homeland' and, by extension, she includes it in the American culinary lexicon, which acts as a marker of her now hybrid-self.

This construction, however, invariably produces boundaries of 'authentic', where 'any experience of authenticity is at the same time a building block of a social exclusion' (Muršič 2015 cited in Crossland-Marr and Krause, 2023). Mannur explains Jaffrey's conflicted sense of identity as a condition of this tension where on one hand, Jaffrey is 'reluctant to classify the varied cuisines of India under the homogenising label 'Indian', yet at other times the cookbook replicates the logic of hegemonic Indianness she seeks to complicate' (Mannur, 2009). Part of this paradox is done out of the fear of a complicated identity that Jaffrey holds being minoritised in the American context – her 'penalty' for existing in shallower soil. 'Her reluctance to reify a monolithically defined Indian national identity is but one manifestation of having one's identity 'minoritized' (ibid). As such, Jaffrey and those of the South diaspora are 'reborn as an ethnic minority' in the Western context of the U.S., or in the UK. Mannur questions, 'is this empowerment or marginalisation', to assert heritage as a response to having that identity homogenised. Mishra argues, diasporas are hyphenated groups where 'in the name of empowering people, the classification indeed disempowers them, it makes them, to use a hyphenated term, 'emporingly disempowered' (Mishra, 1996).[8] This conflict came to the fore in my initial outreach for potential participants where one affirmed her belonging 'very strongly' to the UK having lived here for years and feeling assimilated to London and, therefore, would have nothing to contribute. Questioning belonging meant I was suggesting there is a potential for *un*belonging that could unsettle the very sense of belonging. A catch-22 that oscillates between the feeling of 'empowered' and 'disempowered'. The examination of belonging can itself thus pose a fear of not belonging, or of having to prove their claim of belonging to the UK.

To briefly organise the words that have so far made up our understanding of diaspora – 'hyphen', 'hybrid', 'between here and there', 'paradox' – these convey emotions and attitudes of being incomplete, multiple, and shifting. To be diasporic is to exist and work through such feelings. To demonstrate my own personal complicated hybridity, I have an Indian passport, but I have barely lived in the country. I grew up in Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and went to university in the U.S. and the UK, and the majority of my 'rights' in a city are on the basis of restricted visas either on a dependent pass or a student visa. At times, the difference of my hybrid identity does not reflect plurality but fragmentation, and my 'return' cannot be easily located to one particular nation. There is, indeed, no 'smooth' nor unchanging process of identity creation. Gilroy makes a crucial contribution in how diasporas exist and evolve by claiming 'the pressure to associate, remember or forget varies with changes in the economic and political atmosphere' – these power-relations will be discussed further in later sections (Gilroy, 1994). He also suggests

hybridity challenges the idea of 'supranational kinship', like that of imagined communities, and believes diasporic communities are not 'on a linear journey towards the destination that identity represents' (ibid). Instead, Gilroy focuses on the more hopeful linkages between agency, transformation, resistance, where 'the concept of space is itself transformed when it is seen less through outmoded notions of fixity and place' (ibid). Chapter 3 and 4 are examples of such space where I examine East Ham and Southall as important sites of the South Asian diaspora in London.

Recognising identity as evolving is essential in understanding belonging and belonging *to* as it challenges a 'destination' of identity, especially for those within a diaspora in relation to, assimilating, or reaching towards an identity of those considered autochthonous. Diaspora's sense of belonging cannot be attributed to 'original territory since they need the right to inhabit a different territory to their constructed and deferred homeland' (Anthias, 1998). Reaching towards an autochthonous right of belonging also suggests belonging through autochthony is static, challenging again the assumption that 'autochthonous' citizens always feel a sense of belonging. However, 'nationhood requires the production of a people who belong in a particular territory' where 'the need to exclude outsiders defined in ethno-racial terms has always been central to this political sentiment' (Bradley and De Noronha, 2022). If belonging to a nation is predicated on autochthony, belonging will be defined by the exclusions of the allochthonous. This argument is consistent with the critiques of gender and feminist struggles around 'equality', where the pursuit of equality is naturally assumed to uphold binaries – female and male – where the 'male' experience is the yardstick by which progress is measured rather than the dismantling existing norms (Anthias, 2020). The sense of belonging, however, may not even remain consistent amongst those who can claim an autochthonous status as seen in India where Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) introduced new citizenship laws that challenge the nation's long-standing constitution of secularism by leaving many Indian Muslims stateless in Assam.[9]

A hybrid, diasporic identity, therefore, can be 'a sign of challenge and altercation, not of congenial amalgamation or merger' (Ang, 2003). Diaspora and hybridity problematise belonging as an autochthonous assumed right and challenges the power of assimilation where adopting 'British' values and behaviour grants a greater sense of belonging. Instead, diaspora and hybridity demonstrate the complexity in personal feelings of affiliation, attachment, and what belonging 'to' mean, especially when laws, exclusions, racial and otherwise, can shift at any point. Chasing 'inclusion', means reinforcing 'that you have to be a particular kind of person – a citizen, an insider, someone who belongs – in order to access fundamental rights', which does not do much to challenge the very norms that exist which can reduce belonging to a futile practice (Bradley and De Noronha, 2022).

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[9] Regan, H. and Suri, M. (2019) *1.9 million excluded from Indian citizenship list in Assam State*, CNN. Available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2019/08/30/asia/assam-national-register-india-intl-hnk/index.html (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

Neither 'here' nor 'there' - Past, Place and Diaspora

Removing the binary of relocation from one place to one other, Avtar Brah breaks down the word 'diaspora' by its Greek roots as '*dia*, through, and s*peirein*, to scatter', which 'embodies the notion of a centre, a locus, a 'home' from where the dispersion occurs' (Brah, 1996). In doing so, Brah connects diaspora as an image of 'multiple journeys' and presents its paradoxical nature of a movement and that of settlement (ibid). Migration and the diaspora that embark on a journey away from a 'locus' carry with them a complex baggage of socio-economic, political, cultural conditions that impact their journey. As important as it is to understand these conditions, it is also crucial to make sense of the emotional investment and the personal narratives of a diasporic community, especially when such forms of expression, as emphasised by feminist perspectives, are too often reserved for the private or not considered 'political'. A large part of this thesis is made up of these 'private' conversations and to make the everyday conflict more visible. These everyday conditions make up the 'when, how, and under what conditions' diaspora communities take shape (Brah, 1996).

Power relations play an important role in how diasporic communities form and are treated within a new place. To understand the formation of the South Asian diaspora, as is emphasised throughout the thesis, it is important to recognise the omnipresent historical and continuing consequence of the British empire and colonisation, as well as pay attention to the hierarchies reinforced through modes of modern capitalism. The incoming diaspora is 'inserted within the social relations of class, gender, racism, sexuality or other axes of differentiation' (ibid). Diasporas also carry with them their own set of identities where the 'conditions of diaspora or becoming diasporic do not transcend differences of race, class, gender, and sexuality' (Mannur, 2009). The participants, again, are a reflection of a complex and diverse women that belong to the South Asian diaspora.

Brah's breakdown of diaspora informs key insights on the complex ways in which these identities are situated. First, she suggests the 'concept of diaspora centres on the configurations of power which differentiate diasporas internally as well as situate them in relation to one another' (Brah, 1996), or what Dorren Massey calls 'power geometry' (Massey, 2007). Second, in homogenisation and differentiation of a diasporic group, 'who is empowered and who is disempowered in a specific construction of the 'we'? this 'we' to its 'others' (Brah, 1996). As Kimberle Crenshaw has claimed, 'ignoring differences *within* groups contributes to tension *among* groups'(Crenshaw, 1991). These considerations allow us to locate the personal narratives of the participants and how their intersectional positionality influences their belonging. Importantly, Brah suggests the confluence of narratives is 'constructed within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively', which is where these power-relations can be made more visible (ibid).

A key takeaway from Brah's piece asks the important question - 'how and in what ways do these journeys conclude, and intersect in specific places, specific spaces, and specific historical conjunctures?' At first glance, given the sense of mobility, rupture, and displacement, 'place' may appear as less significant for diasporas. However, there are many

iterations of 'place' that take on new meanings in the study of diaspora – the place of 'origin', the place of settlement – but crucially, it emphasises the importance of place as contested, under construction, and changing. The desire, then, to 'seek a sense of place' can be understood as a reaction to such erratic mobility. The importance of place might even be greater as mobility persists or settlement remains precarious. Vijay Mishra writes, diasporas become 'hyphenated bodies' – such as British Asian – where the hyphen 'signifies the vibrant social and cultural spaces occupied by diasporas in nation-states as well as their ever-present sense of the 'familiar temporariness'' (Mishra, 1996). To study Southall, East Ham, London, and its residents, we are concerned with how these diasporic journeys exist – past and present – and how some have 'concluded' in these locations and what they mean to the diaspora. This isn't to suggest mobility itself has concluded, nor does it negate the anxiety and looming fear of temporariness as described by the participants later in this chapter. Specifically, I want to explore how these neighbourhoods become a site of fragmentation and disruption, yet a place of 'homogenised' (at least in popular imaginaries) diaspora? Do they represent Massey's understanding of a 'global sense of place'?

Diasporic journeys here must include a broader conversation of the South Asian diaspora at large, as Mishra suggests. He distinguishes between 'old' Indian diaspora as part of early capitalism and the 'new' Indian diaspora of advanced capitalism, moving to metropoles. For example, beginning with 1830s indentured labourers, 'a million people had been transported to India (largely from the Hindi-speaking North) to Mauritius, South Africa, Trinidad, Guyana, Surinam, and Fiji to help produce the pre-eminent stimulant, sugar, 'an indispensable additive to sauces and pastry', for the swelling ranks of tea-drinking and chocolate-eating leisured class in the West' (Mishra, 1996). Mishra tracks the 'social mobility of culture specific food' by connecting what was commonly found as 'indentured cuisine' on the ships that made its way to the colonies and their diets. Mishra argues the fluidity of how Indian food shaped the local cuisine in places like Trinidad, which was later transformed by other processes of hybridisation, is an example of how the 'old Indian diasporas Indians transformed the physical and cultural landscape to such an extent that these landscapes are now meaningless without reference to them' (ibid). Hybridity in food, therefore, has been a longstanding practice in the process of migration.

Mishra suggests the 'new' diaspora have the potential for re-articulation of their diasporic formation, however, the past is 'progressively mediated'. Commenting on V.S. Naipaul's novel *A House for Mr Biswas*, Mishra notes how the 'Indian past exists in the rituals of religion and eating', (as one example) where the tea and biscuits were a common ship staple, re-emphasising the cultural overlap of the old and new in contemporary spaces (ibid). This is evident by the British-born participants who share stories of their heritage through the experiences and eyes of their parents or grandparents. Their understanding of their South Asian identity is heavily re-articulated in London through the food prepared at home. In the Southall chapter, I expand on this idea of generational differences and 'old' and 'new' diaspora and make a case for belonging as not a linear nor static experience. While there are considerable ways that the 'old' diaspora differs from the 'new', the participants' stories often include historical encounters – for example, recounting racism experienced by their

parents, or thinking of how food adaptations were necessary as many ingredients that may be available now were impossible to source previously. It is these stories of difference and similarities that are of interest – what are the power struggles that have existed in the past that continue to persist today? How have struggles transformed over been overcome? All these personal reflections allow us to understand how South Asian women express their sense of belonging.

One of the contemporary challenges today requires the new diaspora to contend with the 'multicultural' hyphen of being British-Asian, where they must 'make meanings of the hyphenated subject within a nation-state that always privileges the citizen who is not hyphenated' (Mishra, 1996). Mishra argues the hyphen allows for individuals to situate themselves as belonging to both 'here' and 'there', where belonging 'there' relies on the imaginary and fantasy of homeland. These places of transnational belonging also raises the question of attachment to place – which places fits the diasporic individual best? Berlant argues 'attachments are made not by will, after all, but by an intelligence after which we are always running' (Berlant, 2011). Belonging, therefore, is complicated by 'the schizophrenic discourse of exile' where the diaspora 'here' face racial exclusion and 'there' is an imaginary self-told narrative, a place of refuge from the pressures. Representing the 'new' diaspora, Hanif Kureishi writes,

> And indeed, I know Pakistanis and Indians born and brought up here who consider their position to be the result of a diaspora: they are in exile, awaiting return to a better place, where they belong, where they are welcome. And there this 'belonging' will be total. This will be home, and peace. (Kureshi cited in Mishra, 1996)

Kureishi attributed this 'nostalgia without memory' as coined by Appadurai, at the time of his writing in the 80s and 90s, to Thatcherism. While unpacking the development of the Conservative party from Enoch Powell's Rivers of Blood Speech to Margaret Thatcher's emboldening racism is best left for other research endeavours, it does situate similar tensions of belonging now. The current long tenure of the Conservative party and back-to-back Home Secretaries (of South Asian heritage) introducing their own brand of racism, on the back of Brexit, challenges this sense of belonging for many living in the UK and for the diasporas. Ang argues that in the contemporary politics of diaspora, it is assumed that the attachment to a cultural heritage and ancestry is more important than the identity and connection to where one lives that determines their sense of belonging. The suffix of 'Asian' in British Asian is not always reproducing a hybrid sense of identity but also expressing an exclusion, just like that of a nation, feeding into the 'presumption of internal ethnic sameness and external ethnic distinctiveness' (Ang, 2003). It is perhaps because of the unwelcoming and hostility that belonging 'here' amounts to that belonging 'there' is a welcoming fantasy. This produces a double-edged sword, not least because the very attachment to heritage becomes the signal for the lack of 'assimilation' as required by this Home Office. The conflict of diaspora deepens in such political conditions and is felt differently by a variety of intersecting identities – for example, visibly Muslim and South Asian women carry with them a greater burden in a growing environment of anti-Muslim sentiment (Redclift, Rajina and Rashid, 2022). Ang

suggests the conflict of diaspora can be expressed as a loss of identity (through migration and mobility) and 'stresses the need and opportunity to restore it' (Ang, 2003) which can take shape in many ways, including surrounding oneself within specific places of community that can be reactionary, but also, a manageable space they can navigate.

Neither 'here' nor 'there' is context dependent, riddled with conflict, of joy and pain of one's identity, but its negotiation is what gives diaspora meaning and, for our purpose, a productive intervention to discuss belonging. Additionally, 'here' and 'there' may not be singular places as in *the* 'homeland' and *the* home of diaspora - or in our case South Asia broadly and the UK. The journey can include (as is the case for many participants) multiple homes, travelling from India to Pakistan or vice versa due to Partition. The diaspora includes Ugandan Asians, University students, or the many South Asians who move due to labour demands in Nepal, Hong Kong, or Singapore before finding employment in the UK, and more. Individual journeys are part of a diasporic journey that represent a web of affiliations in and of itself where the 'old' and 'new' are overlapping not only as part of one's identity but also in places like Southall and East Ham that are imbued with meaning and identity more symbolically as home to the South Asian diaspora in London. To further anchor the conflict, the conditions that make diaspora question belonging can stem from contemporary crises of immigration, Brexit, where even concerns of the *kind* of South Asian representation in government influence the complicated feelings and sense of belonging to the UK. The hybridity of identity is further impacted by the power geometry that requires attention to highlight the differences of how these influences matter and affect belonging.

Making of a Diaspora - Nation-State, Membership and Power

To mark the trajectory of the different experiences of diaspora, it is important to recognise, as Brah, Mishra, Ang and Massey do, the influence of globalisation and the associated projects of capitalism, technology, and more. To situate these different influences, Arjun Appadurai's 'Global cultural flows', devises five dimensions – ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes – that can help frame and map contemporary diasporic journeys (Appadurai, 1990). While Appadurai's framework was written in the 90s, his contribution remains significant in understanding what he calls 'imagined worlds' where the five scapes traverse beyond borders that create the disjunctures in the contemporary world we live in. Importantly, he expels any notion of binaries of global or local, north, or south by adopting the use of flows and *scapes* to describe the complexity and tensions of global cultural economy. With this in mind, it is not simply a diaspora and the imagined motherland – as Brah emphasises, there can be multiple, overlapping journeys. For example, the South Asians in East Africa as part of colonial subjects of the British Empire, Gurkhas in Hong Kong, to examples of the many people travelling for work and study. These *scapes* also comment on the various nation-states, transnational organisations, and more that depend on and contribute to the global structure of labour and reproduce the process of globalisation and flows. This is also crucial to understand how the power dynamics begin to form in migration and diasporic groups, where differences between class and status hugely impact day to day life.

Appadurai defines each scape and explores how they are related to and different from one another and how they come to shape local communities, which is particularly helpful to explore the contemporary Southall and East Ham diaspora further. Appadurai defines 'ethnoscape' as 'the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live' including immigrants and refugees who can 'never afford to let their imaginations rest too long, even if they wished to' (Appadurai, 1990). To briefly summarise, technoscapes and financescapes refer to the technologies and global capital that have catapulted cross-border movements. Whereas mediascape refers to the increased accessibility of information across the globe, 'in which the world of commodities and the world of 'news' and politics are profoundly mixed' (ibid). Ideoscapes are to do with the state's ideologies and ideas, including narratives such as democracy and rights. Appadurai uses this framework to account for a flow of people, goods, money, ideas, and more that impact global culture – therefore, summarising how some of the journeys for the participants and their families have led them to London in the first place. Importantly, Massey's would emphasise how 'different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections' (Massey, 2007). This introduces a key reflection on the role of power, which will be addressed in detail in future sections to situate the very different backgrounds and migration stories of the research participants.

Place to reproduce 'Homeland.'

To focus on the landscapes that make up an ethnoscape, neighbourhoods can be seen as a space for 'restoration' of a lost identity as Ang and Massey suggest, a 'site for the rearticulation of an intercultural formation' (Mishra, 1996). Ang raises concerns with such closed-off spaces that 'brings out the intrinsic contradiction locked into the concept of diaspora, which, logically, depends on the maintenance of an apparently natural essential identity to secure its imagined status as a coherent community' (Ang, 2003). This, however, can be seen as a constant tension of nation-states as it is of diaspora, where nation-state membership is territorially bound whereas diaspora is an imagined community that may be physically deterritorialised, but symbolically bound. Appadurai demonstrates this by thinking of the turbulent relationship between state and nation-state, where 'there is a battle of the imagination, with state and nation seeking to cannibalise one another' (Appadurai, 1990). For example, Narendra Modi's BJP ideological and political wish to dominate as a Hindutva nation, branding the ethnic superiority of Hinduism over a heterogenous Indian population. Such political projects complicate the question of authenticity and autochthony by attempting to standardise a sense of identity. Muslim Indians, therefore, cannot be 'inside' the BJP's perception of the nation (*How India's Hindu Nationalists Are Weaponizing History Against Muslims*, 2023). The disjuncture of the state and the nation is similar to the concern raised by Ang, Brah, and Massey on the construction of diaspora and who is being empowered. The tension of diaspora is reproduced in a delicate balance between nostalgia, place, and bordering within a rearticulation of culture and identity towards a global sense of place.

Places like Southall, East Ham, Hounslow, and more across Greater London (and across the UK) challenge the physically demarcated borders as they, like all boundaries, represent *some*

sense of separation and insulation from the 'outside'. Such diasporic ethnoscapes have a sense of shared community where Tooting can feel similar to Wembley given a similar diaspora and corresponding commercial storefronts. Such deterritorialization-territorialisation creates 'new markets… who thrive on the need of the deterritorialized population for contact with its homeland' (Appadurai, 1990). These places start to resemble 'Little India', 'Banglatown' and its South Asian equivalents elsewhere, in places like Serangoon Road or Brickfields in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur respectively, becoming a transnational ethnoscape of the South Asian diaspora globally where 'ethnicity, once a genie contained in the bottle of some sort of locality (however large) has now become a global force, forever slipping in and through the cracks between states and borders' (ibid). As the 'experience will be different in different places, the bonds must be those of origin rather than position/experience' (Anthias, 1998). While the 'origin' itself is vast and diverse, as an all-encompassing sense of 'South Asia' would suggest, certain references and nods (restaurants, food shops, clothing items, and other commodities) have mostly positive associations with South Asian diasporic sites.

Such neighbourhoods in London also boast a sense of 'regional South Asia' where East Ham is predominantly South Indian whereas Southall is broadly Punjabi. A sense of boundaries of such sites also serves a purpose to establish a place with meaning. Southall, as will be discussed in detail later, has a political and cultural value that is derived, 'in large part, precisely from the specificity of its interactions with 'the outside' (Massey, 2007) that construct the local place of diaspora on the 'inside'. It may be that such places are the only space that one feels comfortable navigating, or that mobility is restricted financially. As such, enclosure becomes a means of defending a place, reigniting the tension of inclusive/exclusive boundaries of diaspora, and of joy and pain of diasporic identity.

To take into consideration the commentary by Mishra, Ang, and Massey, the construction of an identity and place as being 'bound' challenge the similar binaries of fixity and rootedness versus hybrid and flexible. The plasticity of identity of place, as Massey posts, 'is much more open and provisional than most discussions allow' (Massey, 2007). The construction of place and the construction of identity is a meditation amongst the contradictions, conflicts, and negotiation as a result of social relations and interactions that are dynamic and ever changing. Southall can equally be a space for South Asian diaspora and of hybridised identity where the 'boundaries have become utterly porous, even though they are artificially maintained' (ibid). Such neighbourhoods can serve as a meeting place where people engage with their heritage and with others within and outside the diaspora. Many supermarkets in Southall, for example, will have food commonly considered 'South Asian', while also carrying staples like plantains (or matoke as they are known in Uganda) or scotch bonnets, food more commonly found in 'African' cooking. While these foodstuffs may be heavily associated with a particular cuisine, such everyday produce is part of several cuisines. Matoke with peanut curry, for example, is symbolic of the local Ugandans and Indian settlers. After all, the culinary

influence of Asians and Africans is interlinked through a cross-cultural history of colonialism, migration, and expulsion.[10]

Power-Geometry in Diaspora

So far, this section has aimed to unpack the meaning of diaspora. However, similar to exploring 'belonging', the word and concept has become a composite of differing emotions, leaving the actual application of the word devoid of specificity. Beyond understanding diaspora as a term for those living outside their supposed 'homeland', diaspora is very much a site of conflict, of physical, imagined, and symbolic (un)boundedness. In one sense, the flexibility of the concept means it fits a generic narrative – a displaced individual or community, a 'past' homeland(s), a 'current' place of residence, a condition that causes mobility, and the relationships that are maintained amongst these positions. Importantly, understanding diaspora serves as a starting point to investigate gender and class relations more meaningfully. As emphasised, the participants of this research, while belonging to the South Asian diaspora, have unique stories and backgrounds. Exploring power inequalities in the personal stories is a tool for examining the political realities in which the participants express their attachments and articulate their sense of belonging.

A persistent challenge in this research is the numerous identities that have an 'affect' on each participant. An inevitable part of any ethnographic undertaking with diverse participants is recognising the shortcomings of the research. There are clear distinctions in categories where the positionality of my research participants is a matter of self-articulated identities or assumed identities – identifying as migrants, women, Asian, British-born, and more. The participants of Southall Black Sisters (SBS) who are living in London as refugees or asylum seekers have a particular socio-legal category that is not applicable to the other participants in East Ham, or the chefs interviewed for this project. While a legal framework is necessary to consider for those dealing most basically with their precarious, or lack of, status in the country, the focus of this research is on the everyday experience in which the socio-legal circumstances affect their access – however mundane or complex it may be from the right to work to having financial capacity to travel around the city. Particularly in the case of the SBS participants, I want to emphasise that the interviews were designed to understand the impact their legal status and their intersecting burdens (Crenshaw, 1991) may have on their articulation of belonging. Additionally, it is not just their legal category but the violence the participants at SBS have endured that influence their rights in the UK. As I'll detail in Chapter 4, these sensitive conversations on abuse were part of their narrative in describing belonging, but this thesis does not meaningfully examine the intersection of domestic abuse and belonging for immigrant women as it is out of the scope of research.

There are other crucial identities that intersect with the participants' racial, ethnic, and gender identity. Sexual orientation, age, religion, and disability to name a few. After all, there are

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[10] Madoi, R. (2022) *The culinary influence of Asians*, *Monitor*. Available at: https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/special-reports/the-culinary-influence-of-asians-4029610 (Accessed: 31 August 2023).

potentially infinite categories of difference that contribute to one woman's intersecting identities. These crucial categories cannot be deciphered individually for those reasons but also in part due to the nature of the focus group with SBS that did not allow for much personal interrogation due to privacy and security. There are several such categories that did not appear organically nor frequently in conversation, although they are likely to be context-dependent and require more targeted research. Such identities are not, as Anthias suggests, neatly organised and are likely to influence how these participants respond and articulate their position without referring to them separately. These intersecting categories ensure the experience of the South Asian diaspora is neither homogenised nor essentialised. Anthias' raises the question, 'not what is intersectionality but what is the problem intersectionality addresses?' (Anthias, 2020) As established, different groups have distinct relationships to their mobility and experience of belonging. In this section, I am looking at gender and class as two main intersecting categories for the South Asian diaspora in this research.

Who is empowered in the Diaspora?

Diaspora, as established, has been understood in contrast to a rooted sense of nation-state. Within these opposing positions exists multilayered identities of citizenship, various legal statuses, and the broadly covered gender, racial and ethnic identity and specific to this research, the South Asian diaspora. However, to reconsider the 'generic' narrative, there may be any number of opposing feelings from the sense of 'displacement' to the nostalgia felt of the 'past' and the 'condition' that causes mobility which complicate the experience of those that are diasporic. For example, the participants within this research, who all belong to the South Asian diaspora, may consider themselves situated within the diaspora in different ways. Participants EG and AC, who are both in the education field, one born in India, and the other born in Birmingham, perceive their attachment to the 'homeland' in very different ways. The participants of SBS are perhaps the most divergent group in this thesis, where most of the women have a pending case with the Home Office and no recourse to public funds. Additionally, language barriers also make their movement within the city challenging. Not only does this profoundly impact their sense and articulation of belonging, but also, the way they organise their everyday lives will be remarkably different from other participants in this project. The other participants are on either long-term visa, have naturalised citizenship, or were born in the UK. While I have critiqued belonging through citizenship, it is a political reality that places the SBS participants in a more vulnerable position in their claim to live in the UK. In Chapter 4, I expand on this correlation of belonging and rights and the cruel optimism it produces for these participants.

This research does commit something Anthias cautions us about – 'one is tempted to assume that the thing that binds them together is an attribution of origin. If this is the case, it already assumed that which it purports to investigate' (Anthias, 2020). To use diaspora as a condition, rather than a description of a group, allows us to focus on the tangible experiences of 'being from one place and of another', with an understanding of a colonial tie and legacy of South Asia, and therefore have a more dynamic conversation on belonging – one that is beyond citizenship but does not simplify nor deny the reality of these legal boundaries. The

meaningfulness of belonging to the 'South Asian diaspora' may vary, but it is a condition with which we can begin to understand how belonging takes shape within their everyday lives.

Anthias asks, 'what are the commonalities between a North Indian upper-class Oxbridge-educated university teacher and a Pakistani waiter or grocer? How meaningful is it to refer to them as part of the Asian diaspora in Britain let alone the Asian diaspora more globally?' (ibid). Specific to this research, while everyone interviewed in this project identified as a woman of South Asian diaspora, their heritage can be traced in multiple locations across the subcontinent – Lahore, Kerala, Gujrat, Kolkata, Jalandhar, Kathmandu, and more. Almost all the literature I have used for this research talks about 'differences' – differences of ethnicity, gender, migration, foodstuffs, attachment, routines, religion, rituals – our differences, again, can be infinite. To overcome our differences, we tend to focus on our similarities and emphasise how we are, essentially, the 'same'. However, instead of appeasing our anxieties of differences with similarities, I am interested in how our differences are the site of importance and articulation, a position from which to assess structures of power, of belonging, which then can lead to solidarity through difference. In doing so, I want to make a case for the hybridity that cannot place people into tidy categories. The intention, therefore, is to recognise the different ways in which these participants articulate their belonging from the multiple sites and places that they can attribute their lineage or family or where they have lived for any number of years.

Following Anthias' conceptualisation of gender and diaspora, she is concerned with the 'ways in which men and women of the diaspora are inserted into the social relations of the country of settlement, within their own-self defined 'diaspora communities' and within the transnational networks of the diaspora across national orders' (ibid). While this thesis is not comparative of the experiences of genders within the South Asian diaspora, it explores personal narratives of how these participants have articulated their position in and amongst their everyday and gendered living. In the case study chapters, I employ this idea of empowerment and inequalities within a diaspora to explore the participants' positionalities and their experience of belonging. For example, AC describes the physicality and look of her South Asian clothing as a marker of her 'otherness'. Chef A considers the role of South Asian women as being the feeders of her community, whereas Chef B found the specificity of shape in a roti to be a punishing requirement of her labour.

The focus group with Southall Black Sisters explores gendered violence and deals more intimately with the exclusions placed upon their migration, access, and everyday life in London. This inherently raises issues of class, religions, and other categories of difference – many that cannot be meaningfully addressed in this research alone, including sexuality, age, and disability. While there is certainly an economic value to how class is positioned, as Anthias suggests, unequal resource distribution is not simply an economic concern, but should be seen in 'terms of a border notion of the conditions of existence of the liveable self… which includes legality, political rights and citizenship… issues of safety, sociality, recognition, citizenship…' (Butler 2006, Anthias, 2020). These narratives may or may not

suggest a common, gendered South Asian diasporic experience but the aim is not to homogenise this condition but to expand on the unique expressions and challenges of belonging, and the role of food, if any, on their experience. Power geometries are not unique to a 'public' feeling of exclusion (visa status, societal expectations), but also a reflection within domestic spaces at home. Looking at food, as I highlight in the following section, gives us an insight into how the public and private interact. Examining food further along with gender roles also questions where power is being instigated – in the 'past' or the 'traditional' roles of a place of origin, the place of residence or a combination of multiple places?

Food and Gender Roles

Diaspora is a condition of both joy and pain, a potential for empowerment where the hyphenated identity can equally disempower individuals as 'other'. In order to expand on the complexity of this condition, gender and food is a place from which we can begin to examine the ambivalence, contradictions, pleasure, and empowerment that exist in the act of cooking and eating. It is 'possible to see ethnicity, gender and class as crosscutting and mutually reinforcing systems of domination and subordination, particularly in terms of processes and relations of hierarchisation, unequal resource allocation and inferiorisation' (Anthias, 1998). For example, the public/private eating relationship women have with food and belonging is illustrative of a kind of conflict between domination and subordination. At the beginning of the thesis, in Research Story, KV talks about the responsibility placed on women in families, joint families in particular, to plan and prepare for meals for the household. While she is reluctant to go into detail about the violence she experienced by a male member of the family, she also refers to the kitchen as a space where women in joint families are surrounded by other women, and violence is, to some extent, kept outside this space for a while. The kitchen, cooking, and performing an expected labour was both a burden but also provided moments of relief of violence and subordination elsewhere in the home. An important caveat to make here is the lack of engagement on food and domestic responsibilities covered in the interview with SBS participants as there was not sufficient time. The intersection of gendered violence, and domestic labour, therefore, cannot be meaningfully covered in this thesis. However, I want to highlight this to demonstrate the ambivalence that is tangible in the everyday experience of food and gender roles.

As established, much of cooking at home is under the purview of the domestic domain and a gendered responsibility for women, and for those in a diaspora, women are often the carriers of their 'home' culture. This extends to reproducing a sense of national identity through food at home, which encompasses more than simply cooking a meal but the process of sourcing specific items that may not be readily available, travelling, planning, adapting ingredients and more to reproduce a 'home' meal. The capacity and resources at one's disposal directly impact this process – how much do such food items cost? Is transportation to these shops relatively simple? What kind of space exists in the home to replicate recipes? How does the physical task of cooking intersect with the emotional labour of *having* to cook as the woman

in the house? Does anyone else share the responsibilities? Is there pleasure to be derived from cooking?

In Mannur's example of Jaffrey's cookbook, nostalgic weight was placed on food from the perspective of an 'upper-class Indian immigrant' who only learnt how to cook at the age of 20 having moved to England. Having moved to the UK as a student, feeling homesick for India was better expressed through the longing for home food that was unavailable in her new place of residence (Mannur, 2009). This is also the experience Chef A shared, having migrated to the UK after marriage, not equipped with much culinary knowledge until she felt homesick and decided to spend time in India to learn how to cook from her grandmother and mother. In the case of both chefs in this project, were also discouraged from spending time in the kitchen and had careers in other fields before finding a place in the food industry. For them, their distance from cooking and the kitchen was a form of rebellion of the kind of labour that was reserved for women with no agency and a performance of femininity that felt 'archaic' as career women. Oftentimes, it was not simply about rebellion or avoidance of cooking but also an opportunity to take up space elsewhere, to pursue a PhD as chef A has or produce documentaries as chef B did. Their class, education, family, migration, and more granted them a freedom from cooking, however, this eventually became an empowering career as diasporic women.

Originally published in 1973, Jaffrey then claimed quality Indian food could only be found in Indian homes, which led to a feeling of 'guilt and patriotic responsibility… someone had to let Americans know what authentic Indian food was like' (Mannur, 2009), a feeling that is duplicated in some sense with both chefs. However, their claims would stem from an empowered sense of heritage and regionality rather than patriotism. For Chef B it was making a 'bun kebab', a regional speciality that no one else seemed to be doing in London. For Chef A, it was challenging 'outside' restaurant food that had become monotonous and wanting to bring the domestic home to the public – in particular, to challenge the male dominated and culinary educated chefs that overpopulate the food industry. Importantly, their relationship with food has changed, starting from their home kitchens to eventually taking over public spaces through restaurants and supper clubs.

The empowerment/disempowerment, domination/subordination, heritage/nationality dualities are constant sites of tension, yet it is not simply one or the other, but the lived experiences of the participants is much more fluid and complex. For the chefs, these experiences are furthered by an economic condition where food and cooking has taken on a different kind of labour from the domestic domain to a productive business. Reimagining food became a subversive act in itself, while confronting the trappings of a role in domestic homemaking. In both chefs' stories, there is a desire to supplant the gendered expectation 'with a consciously feminist script' (Mannur, 2009). It is important to note that these struggles are constant and while there is a subversive act in cooking how *they choose* to cook, it is not consistently empowering. The physical and emotional labour is always present, and their professional responsibilities do not shirk their domestic roles in the home. It is neither one thing nor the other – there is space within these dualities themselves – which is what makes ambivalence a

particularly salient way to express their emotions and attitudes towards cooking, eating, and their belonging.

While Chef B assigns a lot of her good fortune to her family and their economic capacity to build her business, Chef A considers the role of the women in her kitchen before she comments on her own class as an 'impoverished aristocrat'. She refers to the generalised patriarchal routines around cooking where women are often the last to eat or the way her mum showed her love was not by words but by the act of feeding her favourite meals. The maternal figure in her life and the affection she felt was through consuming and eating, which was fitting as her mum was a food entrepreneur who ran a catering business. The way in which her public/private life was blurred carried on to her own experience of setting up a restaurant as an extension of hosting supper clubs in her home. The subversive act of cooking for (mostly) pleasure, a labour that is met with financial reward, while exercising the aspects of culture and heritage that best suits them, created space for their sense of belonging through their layered identities. While what is considered a gendered and cultural performance of 'Indianness', cooking and serving food for Chef A is a sign of control as what she refers to as being 'custodians of our culture'. As the Chefs chapter indicates, the food they prepare and share pays attention to their ancestral roots, while allowing for space to be creative, to think of the contradictions in their culture through gender roles and relations, and to translate these into their business.

Feminism and Food

When I began researching chefs I could speak to for this project, I was expecting to find assumed gender imbalance in the industry. The professional job of cooking has often been reserved for men, whereas the private, domestic arena often fell under the domain of women in the household. This is particularly salient in diasporas where 'women are central transmitters of ethnic traditions (having a special role to play in ceremonial and ritual activities, keeping in touch with families and so on) and religious and familial structures' (Anthias, 2020). Dissecting gender roles in public/private cooking would warrant an entirely different dedicated study. However, in my research, the significance of heritage and cooking appears to be particularly pronounced amongst women chefs and cooks. This isn't to claim that men in the South Asian diaspora are not discussing heritage in their food stories, but that there is a palpable movement of South Asian women chefs and cooks that are engaging with their backgrounds through food. In 2018, online food magazine featured South Asian supper clubs which are championing the more intimate dining experience with an added personal touch of sharing stories and historical accounts of families, migration, rituals, and routines that surround not only the food itself but the manner of consumption, too – a form of practising collective memory. [11]

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[11] Bilgrami, R. (2018) *At London's South Asian supper clubs, dinner is served with a story*, *Eater*. Available at: https://www.eater.com/2018/10/4/17924886/supper-clubs-london-indian-cooking-asma-khan-immigrant-chefs (Accessed: 07 September 2023).
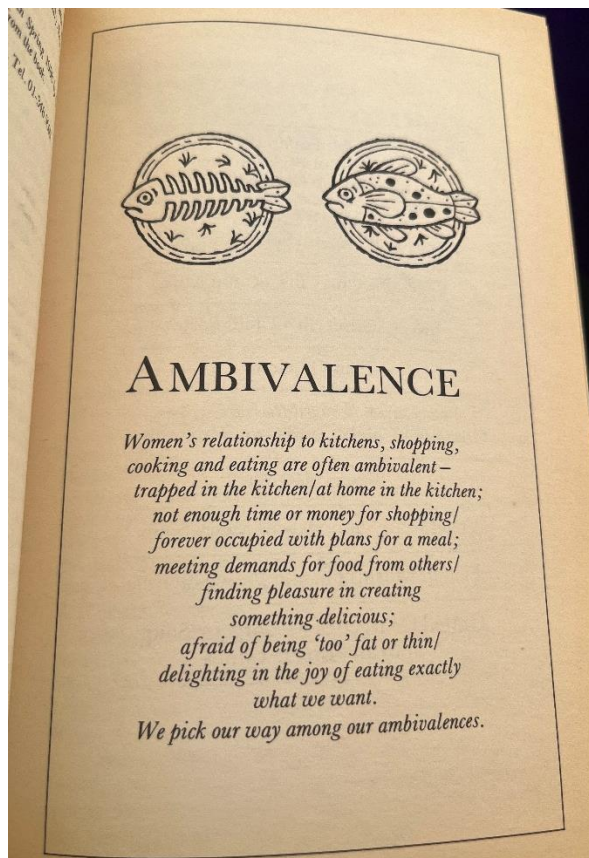
Migrateful, a non-profit charity organisation, hosts cookery classes led by migrant chefs and cooks, majority of whom are women. While the type of classes may differ, the focus is often placed on the chef and their background.[12] TiffinWalli CIC is a women-led social enterprise that provides catering services for businesses and the community. They recently conducted a National Heritage Funded project titled 'The Asian Home Culinary Culture Evolution in Newham,' collecting oral stories of Asian women's relationship with food. These interviews included 'how Asian women adapted, created fusions, and changed the culinary experience of their communities'. [13] While the responsibility of carrying culture seems to be on the shoulders of women, it is no surprise, then, that women are the ones most intimately involved in conversations on food, place, heritage and belonging.

As part of the British Library's Food Season 2023, I attended a talk on 'The Feminist Kitchen: Turning the Tables'. Published in 1987, *Turning the Tables: Recipes and Reflections from Women* is a feminist cookbook that featured women from various backgrounds, sharing recipes (or thoughts) on food, feminism, and politics – particularly how to reconcile with feminism and the seemingly opposing anti-feminist stance of the kitchen as a subordinating space in the family home. While this book is no longer available in print, I was able to peruse one of the contributor's copies at the event. The talk and the book capture the complicated position of ambivalence – the ideological conflict of two seemingly opposing positions that can be present simultaneously. In the book's introduction, Dena Attar, a feminist historian, wrote 'no cookbook is simply a collection of recipes. Almost all are at least partly made up of propaganda promoting the ideology of a woman's place… in the kitchen'. [14]

[12] *Meet the chefs: Refugees: Migrateful: Cookery classes London* (2023) *Migrateful*. Available at: https://www.migrateful.org/chefs/ (Accessed: 07 September 2023).

[13] *Preserving flavours of the past: Discover Food Heritage: Home Made Food: Tiffin Walli: UK* (2023) *TiffinWalli CIC*. Available at: https://www.tiffinwalli.co.uk/food-heritage (Accessed: 07 September 2023

[14] Careless, E. (2023) *80s dinner party: The Politics of Feminist Food Writing*, *History Workshop*. Available at: https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/feminism/80s-dinner-party-the-politics-of-feminist-food-writing/ (Accessed: 07 September 2023).

How can cooking be emancipatory for women? As established, for diaspora, it is the feeling of 'here' and 'there' that sometimes can be the hopeful 'hybrid'. For women, the kitchen can be a domestic space of claustrophobic responsibility and a feminist space of empowerment.

Previously, I discussed the importance of the word 'difference' that can activate a more nuanced understanding of experience. In this feminist cookbook, the word 'ambivalence' functions in a similar manner – it is a position that cannot reduce the relationship women have with food to a singular feeling. Dismissing the domestic kitchen as a slight, 'a place for women', fails to recognise the power that the space has to be empowering, or, a place of ambivalence, which has its own benefits. Importantly, there is also pleasure to be had – eating is preserving time for the woman to fulfil her own desires of pleasure.

AMBIVALENCE

Women's relationship to kitchens, shopping, cooking and eating are often ambivalent – trapped in the kitchen/at home in the kitchen; not enough time or money for shopping/ forever occupied with plans for a meal; meeting demands for food from others/ finding pleasure in creating something delicious; afraid of being 'too' fat or thin/ delighting in the joy of eating exactly what we want.
We pick our way among our ambivalences.

Excerpt from *Turning the Tables: Recipes and Reflections from Women*

Class, Belonging and Place

In this section, I want to further situate the participants' positionality from which they articulate their belonging. While we have discussed diaspora, gender, and race, understanding inequalities can be deepened by examining class and how they intersect with other precarities (Anthias, 2020). As mentioned, class here will refer to more than just an economic capacity but as a means of 'locating it within a range of inequality-producing relations' (ibid). To this end, class can be used 'just as a descriptive label for such differences' which relies on cultural markers, 'class habitus' as coined by Pierre Bourdieu – where one lives, what their preferences are, etc. (ibid). Class, as a category, in contrast with that of race (and to some extent gender) is not entirely fixed. Class, if expressed through education or occupation, means there is a potential for mobility should either of those circumstances improve. As Anthias argues, 'in concrete relations class makes effective the workings of race and gender as inequality regimens, but the workings (and naturalising properties) of race and gender enable the workings of class' (ibid). Anthias' argument isn't to oversimplify the workings of class as a more mobile category in relation to race and gender, but to highlight the inequalities that emerge from an already established race and gender identity. For this thesis, how does being a South Asian woman enable the workings of class? Anthias' argument helps organise a response where, 'unequal life chances (as opportunity structures) and outcomes (as

hierarchical locations) are products of an intersectional process, which constitutes social stratification' (ibid). All this informs not only the economic value of class but also the access and opportunities that are part of the makings of class.

<u>Opportunity Structures</u>

As discussed, belonging, diaspora, nationalities, all are forms of boundary-making and bordering. These categories come with their stigmas and inclusion/exclusion criteria. Class is about a similar project of boundary-setting and hierarchies, where 'class is directly dependent on inequality' (Anthias, 2020). The intersecting relations of gender, race, and class informs how people are ordered socially, legally, and politically. Such categories of identities are placed within existing hierarchies that are not organic but made. 'They constitute ways of placing populations, encountered and acted upon through a range of ways, through the colonial encounter, through the appropriation and exploitation of labour, through the imperative of the national border, through technologies of social reproduction and the reproduction of labour itself' (ibid). The mobility of an individual in and around borders is dependent on the social relations of power they possess as these identities themselves have the danger of becoming naturalised (ibid). For example, what does the label of 'migrant' or 'refugee' mean for their everyday lives? This 'branding' of individuals corresponds to places that are 'permeated by forms of valuation which provide fuel for the allocation of resources and act as legitimisers of their unequal access and distribution' (ibid). The labels of 'migrant' or 'refugee' not only relate to national borders, but they are also placed within class boundaries, which work together to dictate the level of access granted by the state. This contrasts with the popular narratives that where 'migrants have been perceived as having been given unwarranted privileges (as far as populist leaders and their followers are connected)' which furthers 'ideas about entitlements on the basis of autochthony (that) have coalesced to divide the working class (manifested in Brexit in the UK)' (ibid).

The 'deserving' quality of the migrant is fuelled by the unwarranted privileges – the migrant must 'prove' in order to access privilege. In October 2023, the Home Office will increase the price of visa applications where the immigration health surcharge (IHS) is set to increase by 66%. The Times found the increase will mean the Home Office stands to make a profit of near £3,000 per application.[15] The IHS surcharge is current Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's response to consistent strike actions by key workers in the country, including junior doctors and teachers. Migrants – living in this country or applying for visas from elsewhere – are made to cover the costs, while already paying alarming fees elsewhere. The deserving, therefore, must be someone wealthy, discriminating against those who are already struggling to keep up with a cost-of-living crisis. This decision also finds the migrant as a scapegoat for the low salaries of key workers, pitting the age-old rhetoric of migrant versus worker, while

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[15] Dathan, M. and Menzies, V. (2023) *Visa fee rise and charges will not reduce immigration, minister says*, *The Times & The Sunday Times: breaking news & today's latest headlines*. Available at: https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ministers-at-odds-over-visa-fee-rise-to-reduce-immigration-c2zvgd6tc (Accessed: 26 September 2023).

also making it difficult or impossible for migrants to find work on precarious or limited visas. The Home Office is also withdrawing support for the hundreds of Afghan refugees they have housed in hotels, providing no meals as initially intended. Under the resettlement scheme, hundreds of Afghan refugees remain in hotels without any facilities to cook or store food and rely on cheap takeaways.[16] Facing homelessness, several face greater barriers when trying to secure accommodation based on their 'refugee' status. The decisions made by the Home Office, as established, rely on creating a more hostile environment, and such categories of race, status, gender, and more, become a guarantee of unequal distribution of resources and access – the decision, however, does not come across as purely economical, but politically motivated.

Anthias has argued that class needs to be understood beyond an economic status of employment and wealth. The unavoidable realities of financial security reflect the scarce opportunities afforded by some of the participants as it impacts their social relations and everyday lifestyles. So far, I have tried to challenge what belonging looks like and the 'right' criteria necessary to have a claim to belonging through certain entitlements such as autochthony, citizenship, and paperwork. To highlight, again, the difference in positionalities of the participants, most of the women in the SBS focus group are subject to immigration control, therefore, have no recourse to public funds – a clear indication of their subordination in everyday life. The desire, then, is to fit the 'right' criteria so these opportunities would become available to them – 'hope often involves waiting for something specific to happen' (Berlant, 2011). In OpenDemocracy's report of Afghan refugees in hotels, one claimed that while it was frustrating to live in a hotel for two years, 'he was grateful to the UK for resettling him'.[17] SBS and similar organisations, including Latin American Women's Rights Services, have reported on The Victims and Prisoner Bill, which has consistently omitted migrant women. They cannot access welfare benefits and are more likely to be disproportionately affected resulting from 'their intersectional location' (Thiara, 2023). If their immigration status outweighs their rights and needs, many of these women remain trapped either in abusive relationships or other forms of exploitation. As Crenshaw points out in her 1991 review of the United States Immigration and Nationality Act, 'many immigrant women were reluctant to leave even the most abusive of partners for fear of deportation'(Crenshaw, 1991). The unequal life chances for immigrant women, therefore, have a greater cost than the economic hardships alone, where, as the SBS report finds 'almost two-thirds remained anxious because of their still insecure status and future uncertainty', or those who managed to leave their abusive relationships 'were re-traumatised by the immigration process and the racialised assumptions of services about their issues' (ibid).

Given such limitations on occupation alone, the corresponding opportunities, too, become limited. Yet, the optimism and desire for something better persists. While the chapter on

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16 Bychawski, A. (2023) *Home Office stops feeding Afghans still in hotels*, *openDemocracy*. Available at: https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/home-office-afghan-resettlement-scheme-hotels-meals-food-withdrawn/ (Accessed: 26 September 2023).
17 Bychawski, A. (2023) *Home Office stops feeding Afghans still in hotels*, *openDemocracy*. Available at: https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/home-office-afghan-resettlement-scheme-hotels-meals-food-withdrawn/ (Accessed: 26 September 2023).

Southall and SBS focus group deals more closely with the experiences of women, the manner in which resources are made available 'are generated through the relations of class, gender, racialisation, ethnicity, migration, sexuality and others in intersectional and translocational ways' (Anthias, 2020). Such resources, while economic status influences greatly, the opportunities available are dictated by a combination of categories that become inescapable, with a danger of reproducing itself, and therefore becoming naturalised.

Hierarchical Locations

While there are many ways to think of 'locations', as the thesis revolves heavily around place, I wanted to think of how physical place and class intersect within a hierarchy of locations. Controlling the bodies of diaspora is extended to the control of the place itself. Not only does Southall have a history of racial violence given its South Asian diaspora, it is an area that was disproportionately affected by COVID-19 pandemic, and on-going cost-of-living crisis highlight the rampant inequalities where Southall residents have some of the lowest wages in the Ealing borough.[18] Such hierarchies and power relations extend their influence not only to the individual but to the places where they 'belong'.

As will be discussed in the Southall chapter, the area was initially popular amongst South Asian migrants due to labour demands by neighbouring Heathrow Airport. Most recent migrants were also willing to accept any job, and this often remained within the borough or neighbouring areas, where women worked either in factories or for richer families, carrying out domestic work. Taking advantage of their precarious status, many were left to provide cheap labour, unlikely to receive much aid from unions. The categories (race, gender, class) to which they belonged, influenced by their migration status, meant many had to settle for low-paying jobs, even if they were well-educated in South Asia or Africa, where many had migrated from post Idi Amin's expulsion of Asian people from Uganda. A rather well-known dispute for workers' rights led by South Asian and black women aimed for union membership at Grunwick, 1976 – 1978. Jayaben Desai led these protests, attracting solidarity from postal workers, and others as the strike continued to grow. After two years of struggle, the dispute ended with no formal victory for the protestors but a symbolic fixture of solidarity amongst migrant women workers. Later in 2005, many South Asian women working for Gate Gourmet spoke out on similar working conditions. British Airways (BA) outsourced in-flight meal preparation to The Gate Gourmet, allowing them to pay minimum wage with limited to few benefits while increasing BA profits.

> The temperature where the women worked was kept really low at 3-5 degrees because they handled food, and the conditions were hard. The workers spent all day standing

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[18] *Southall reset* (2022) *Ealing Labour.* Available at: https://www.ealinglabour.com/2022/08/22/southall-reset/ (Accessed: 26 August 2023).

as they prepared food, and they packed the food in trays which moved very fast on the conveyor belt. (Anitha and Pearson, 2013)

Such working conditions, with reduced breaks and sick pay was met with resistance from the workers, who eventually saw their roles replaced by other people willing to work for even less money. Notes from an internal meeting at Gate Gourmet were discovered which 'showed that the managers had been making plans to bring in the agency workers to provoke the women and create a situation where they could be sacked' (ibid), leading to a show of solidarity from other workers at BA, including baggage handlers. However, given the change in law by the Thatcher administration post the Grunwick dispute, 'secondary picketing' was illegal, so while Heathrow was forced to shut for 48 hours, all baggage handlers had to return to work (Anitha and Pearson, 2013). After the Trade Union got involved, some workers were brought back on new, more appalling contracts that saw reduced sick leave and less pay for overtime work. Others accepted voluntary redundancy, while those with chronic health conditions or older women were sacked all together. This resulted in many women feeling abandoned by the union, just as the women who were involved in the Grunwick strike or struggled to find new employment (ibid).

The way class, gender, and race intersected in these two disputes challenged assumptions of South Asian women as 'uninterested in politics'(Wilson, 2006), but also informed the inequality of resource allocation as accessible by the diaspora within a certain location. It is important, again, to note these positions are not static and are being made and reproduced – there are more conversations that can be had about modern capitalism, gentrification, the role of transportation, and the ways this intersects with ongoing realities of economic crises that take shape in the city. However, what is important for us to note is the correlation between space, place, and class where class is not purely a measurement of economic wealth but that of a 'process of inequality making' that 'coexists in a dialogical relation with other spaces of the organisation of difference, such as gender/sex and race/ethnicity' (Anthias, 2020). The notion that those within a diaspora also 'belong' to a specific place, class, and how their gender influences their status shows how the politics of belonging is a 'technology of power' that dictates the hierarchies and resources allocated (ibid).

Social Stratification

The categories that we have so far covered have a symbolic, material, everyday impact for how one lives. As Anthias has argued, class influences more than the economic standing or status, but the influences of gender and race are simultaneously acting on the everyday experience. While much of this section has centred the experience of SBS and Southall has examples of how such categories intersect and position within social structures, I want to draw attention to a seemingly mundane experience shared by participant, AC. Two years into living in London, AC received 10 A* GCSE's. A paper reported on her achievements that applauded her efforts 'despite' only having been in the country for a few years. 'They said I had received a lot of help from the English tutors,' which wasn't true but fit a neat narrative of a particular kind of 'migrant' story. While AC finds humour in the article now, her ethnicity, status was organised in a particular way – her 'class' categorised as an immigrant

with assumptions made about her fluency and understanding of the English language, treating her success as a story of assimilation and integration. A 'facet of this is to treat one as an effect of the other, in terms of the influence of the valuation (and prejudice/racism/discrimination) that accrues to particular ethnic positions, and how this is manifested in terms of class effects or outcomes' (Anthias, 2001). Given the neighbourhood where AC lived at the time (predominantly South Asian) contributed to how she was being perceived by the writer, based on assumptions of the neighbourhood itself. As Anthias' would suggest, her naturalised identities (gender and race) enabled her (assumed) class, which influenced, then, certain assumptions and stigmas associated with all these contributing categories.

Power-Geometry in Diaspora

To summarise the power geometries covered throughout this chapter, I want to once again highlight the two words that hold much significance in the study of diaspora and in this research on the politics of belonging – difference and ambivalence. To centre the question 'who is being empowered in diaspora', these two notions of difference and ambivalence matter greatly. The infinite categories of difference will position individuals in unique ways amongst their social relations and within hierarchies of place and opportunities that are dictated by the resources available to them. Again, these categories work differently and are often shifting – policies and legal structures adapt, as does racism and sexism. A migrant woman, with no recourse to public funds will have a remarkably different experience of belonging to an employment visa-holding South Asian woman based on their legal status alone. As of May 2023, this Home Office is planning to cut 'net migration' by restricting students bringing family members unless they are pursuing postgraduate research degrees. The action to reduce 'education migrants' who are believed to be misusing the visa system and grossly diminishes the lives of students pursuing an education, making assumptions of their lives and relationships. To consider who is 'empowered' also asks the question of how individuals are labelled - who is considered an 'expat' versus a 'migrant', while both suggest residing outside of the country of birth or 'origin'. Again, these labels do not disappear within the borders of the UK but have a profound effect on how one moves within the city.

Diaspora, as Gilroy and others have argued, deals with transnational identity, challenging fixity, and essentialisms. However, as Anthias argues, diaspora 'does so by deploying a notion of ethnicity which privileges the point of 'origin' in constructing identity and solidarity… and does not adequately pay attention to differences of gender and class' (Anderson *et al.*, 2023). In discussing the intersection of gender, race, and class, I hope to make a case for working with differences where I do not homogenise South Asian women but analyse their narratives from their unique positions. To Anthias' argument on 'origin' of diaspora as a starting point, I think of ambivalence as a useful response to complex attachments to nation – either that of origin, previous, current, and future residence that all become part of an elastic home. The relationship to place and heritage is contradictory because most experiences are never one emotion – the capacity to hold two conflicting positions at the same time – as is the case with the words that are so often accompanied with

diaspora – hybrid, hyphen, paradox, and more. This complexity is what makes belonging not only difficult emotion to articulate, but it is also what makes the longing for belonging an act of persistence.

Perhaps better explained for our purposes by Lauren Berlant and their writing on Cruel Optimism, part of the 'national sentimental trilogy' of books. In it, Berlant 'describes the continued attachment (however unwilling) to structures that might lead to the complaint in the first place - a kind of disappointment without disenchantment' (Berlant, 2011). Working through these contradictory positions of nationality, ethnic attachments, and diaspora are *known* – the attachment to fantasy is central to the experience of many migrants, where the desire for mobility, itself is aspirational. However, it means accepting the 'politically … conflicting dreams of a reciprocal world to belong…remains a powerful binding motive to preserve normative habits of social reproduction' (ibid). The 'normative' here is reproducing the very point of 'origin' Anthias argues against. Berlant clearly states that they are not interested in a solution to this problem but 'the need to invest in new genres for the kinds of speculative work we call 'theory'' (ibid). In this thesis, I am aiming for something similar, a way of understanding our belonging as attachment, recognise the challenges this naturally brings on bordering and power, and reframing belonging. As I mentioned at the start of this chapter – the interviews suggest that a sense of belonging is not something achieved over time – in fact, depending on the individual, it can become more precarious. However, there were moments of belonging that were felt 'outside' the normative expression of belonging as complete membership. Moments of belonging that were found in spaces of community, solidarity, and in commensality. In this case, I am using food as a hopeful response to moments of impasse. But it is important to recognise, this, too, is not static, but has its own sense of ambivalence.

Ambivalence is to accept that contradictory feelings can be true at the same time. Berlant writes,

> Optimism is cruel when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving; and, doubly, it is cruel in-so far as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat, that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming. (Berlant, 2011).

This speaks to the very nature of belonging – to belong suggests there is a 'right' criteria, therefore setting up boundaries and exclusions. However, there is pleasure in 'fitting' the criteria. The 'criteria' is forever changing and shifting, unleashing a sense of loss, and bargaining to 'fit' once again, to feel close or a proximity to arriving. Cruel optimism, contrary to the word itself, is not so much about optimism itself, but about the projects that create conditions that are cruel and are reproduced by affective promises. Perhaps, ambivalence is one of the better tools to start to organise against such cruel optimism.

The 'Cruel' Project

If we accept that our imagination is parsed through, generally, optimism for the future, we can work towards unpacking 'dramas of adjustment', what Berlant considers to be the measures of a 'good life' – their example being the national ethos of life in America, the 'American Dream'. I have been, on purpose, loose with my use of 'migrant' and 'diaspora' because both labels suggest a mobility that conveys a 'departure from living-as-usual' (Ahmed, 1999). I do this to challenge notions of belonging and identity as fixed and to centre the discourse of dislocation as a form of 'living-as-usual'. How does the desire for a 'good life' meet the ordinary 'living-as-usual' Berlant asks, 'what does it mean to want a *sense* of something rather than something?' (Berlant, 2011). Is the proximity to a good life a form of ambivalence itself? For Berlant, the desire of being 'somewhere' to make a life is a desire to end mobility, to find 'resting places', which is fuelled by a sense of normalcy. It is similar to Ahmed's reading of 'home' as not a place of arrival but a security of destination (Ahmed, 1999). 'Normalcy' here is defined by the 'neoliberal economic and social conditions of reproducing everyday life' (ibid). I have argued the ways in which individuals and their identities are categorised hierarchically and socially in the environments they live. The fantasy of 'resting places' are as unique and different as the participants in the project, meaning their belonging is suited to their needs and desires.

Berlant poses a tough solution which is to unlearn attachments to cruel regimes of justice. How does the participant working with SBS not desire a defined status that allows them to access services crucial for their everyday lives? How does chef B respond to encounters of racism that make her feel othered without having to 'prove' her Britishness? How does chef A challenge sexism in the restaurant industry when it is the space of her employment? It is the 'fantasy of an unconflicted, site of rest, even if one has known it only as at best a mirage of solidity and stability' (Berlant, 2011) that makes the desire for a normative fantasy compelling, and precisely why 'belonging' must be reimagined. Unlearning attachment, as Berlant offers and as I'll demonstrate in the case studies, is about developing new attachments where belonging, unique to each individual, can be practised. In my interviews, it was either in spaces of solidarity like SBS, or through moments of commensality, a political act where pleasure and identity is practised. However, these, too are not static nor impervious to change. For Berlant, it is this tension and the ambivalence that 'show compassion for our struggles' and 'really where living takes place' (ibid). To centre ambivalence in reimaging belonging is to be mindful of how cruel regimes may change over time, and how the response to them, therefore, must adapt.

Diaspora and Food - Empowerment or Marginalisation?

How can food be this 'awesome' response to the complicated attachments of belonging? Where does 'difference' and 'ambivalence' appear in our study of belonging through food? What is the relationship between people, place, and food towards a sense of belonging if belonging itself can be a cruel project? In other words, how can we prevent defeat by cruel projects?

<u>Food and Diaspora</u>

Food can be seen as a cultural imagination that diaspora populations hold on to as a formation of identity, a portal of the past.

> Food, as a central part of the cultural imagination of diasporic populations, becomes one of the most viable and valuable sites from which to inquire into the richly layered texture of how race is imagined and reinterpreted within the cultural arena, both to affirm and resist notions of home and belonging' (Mannur, 2009).

Cookbook author, Meera Sodha, wrote in her 2015 *Made in India: Recipes from an Indian Family Kitchen:*

> I've never lived in India, but I grew up in England eating the same food my ancestors have eaten for hundreds of years and which I still cook in my kitchen, every day. My family's home cooking is unrecognisable from a lot of the food that is served up in most curry houses across the UK; ours is all at once simple, delicious, and fresh. Real Indian home cooking is largely an unknown cuisine (Sodha and Loftus, 2014).

Sodha's comparison of home cooking and curry houses feels similar to Jaffrey's anxiety of how people outside the diaspora perceive 'Indian food' and don't know the 'real Indian food' so much so that it requires boundaries to be laid within a diaspora of 'authenticity'. In comparison to Jaffrey's book in 1973, Sodha's complaint of the perception of Indian food remains the same in 2015. Who dictates what constitutes 'Indian food' and controls how it is perceived in the UK?

Sejal Sukhadwala, in *Philosophy of Curry,* corrects popular assumptions that while Anglo-Indians during colonisation could not understand the nuances of Indian cooking, they 'were broadly aware that there were regional differences', however paid no mind to differences. The cuisine was eventually broadly stereotyped and 'this homogenisation led to generic pan-Indian curries that lost their regionality' (Sukhadwala, 2022). The comparison of 'curry houses' to 'real Indian cooking' is often cited amongst those in the diaspora, but what it remarks on is a social differentiation between us and them, where class becomes the marker of difference that is also upheld within the diaspora. However, these class differences are often exacerbated by the 'good' 'bad' immigrant divide upheld by social and political structures more broadly – 'authentic' Indian food is 'good', and the curry houses are 'bad' examples of real Indian food. Instead of thinking of such exclusions as a binary of good or bad, what is helpful is to dissect the histories and cultural context in which these boundaries persevere that dictate 'who can participate and when' (Crossland-Marr and Krause, 2023). For those who consider the curry house as 'inauthentic' do not engage with the history of how these restaurants developed, in the era that they were popularised, and the social environment in which they existed.

As I mentioned above, the anxiety of homogenisation led to such claims by Jaffrey and Sodha regarding 'real' cooking, creating a concern that feels uniquely diasporic.

For diasporic communities, spatially and temporally distanced from the geographic parameters of the nation-state, a collective sense of nationhood and an affective longing for the home, and a fear of 'losing' tradition morphs into a desire to vigilantly retain viability and visibility through a systematic attempt to ossify the fragments and shards of cultural practices deemed 'authentic (Mannur, 2009).

John Crowley, as has been cited elsewhere in this research, claimed the politics of belonging is the 'all about the dirty work of boundary maintenance' (Crowley cited in Yuval-Davis, 2011). Ang choreographs a similar analysis of diaspora, where 'diaspora cannot exist without a reification of ethnicity, and therefore a naturalised essentialism and closure,' which presents a paradoxical situation where diaspora, too, has a 'preoccupation with boundary-setting and boundary-maintenance - that needs to be problematised' (Ang, 2003). An update to diaspora itself, however, recognises that 'not all biographically-connected individuals wish to be part of a country's diaspora, while others may feel connected to more than one diasporic community' (32, Jons et al 2015 cited Mavroudi, 2019). To be part of a diaspora is also to recognise that there is 'no one way to feel and be in a diaspora', which allows for the entangled negotiations of identity and belonging to unfold. Anthias asks, 'is diaspora more than a deterritorialised ethnicity?' (Anthias, 1998).

Additionally, are diasporas a contemporary and relevant concern? I would argue that the condition of diaspora is dependent on the context, as they are 'culturally and politically reflexive' (Werbner, 2004). Naben Ruthnum, in *Curry*, describes the 'Indian expat with memory of the country' holding on to nostalgia differently than those of a diaspora, born outside the country (Ruthnum, 2018). He quotes Amit Chaudhuri's nostalgia of Calcutta through its street food, particularly Chinese food that shows the flexibility of the city's cuisine. He describes Calcutta as 'a city that tastes of its complex history, but is too busy, developing, and cosmopolitan to notice' (ibid). What, then, is 'real Indian food', if not an amalgamation of its own history and current influences? As such, it is both identity and food that are always 'in-the-making', and 'we need to critique attempts to define them and be open to attempts that allow flexible and open-ended identities that are positioned and grounded. In this way, place continues to be important, but it is not static anymore because it is dependent on, and forms part of, connections and mobilities' (Mavroudi, 2019).

The cruel project suggests we hold onto attachments, even if we recognise our attachments themselves hinder their success. The paradox of diaspora is that these attachments are held on to different promises – the promise of belonging in the UK, the promise of belonging in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, or elsewhere in South Asia. As I have attempted to demonstrate, we cannot think of identity or belonging as a status, but rather as a process – understanding diaspora, similarly, as a process would then allow for the possibility to 'examine both the politics of representation, of struggle, of identity, as well as the fluid ways those in diaspora might be political as they perform and negotiate and practice their lives and identities in embodied and emotional ways' (Mavroudi, 2019). The food of diaspora, similarly, is a process that cannot be essentialised to be of one place. However, the autochthony and history of food recognises a similar kind of cruel project of attachment. Can and/or should food be

disassociated from its history? The history of food that does not only make something like sesame, chillies, or tomatoes relevant to multiple cuisines of the world, but the history of the people that are associated with developing recipes and continuously finding creative ways for its consumption. As I'll demonstrate in the case studies, there is no one answer to how we nourish or challenge our attachments. However, it is dealt with through ambivalence, and depending on context, memories, and nostalgia that inform a multitude of diasporic identities.

Immigrant Cuisine

To conclude this section, I want to borrow from Anita Mannur's examination of Madhur Jaffrey's cookery book and explore a more contemporary 'South Asian' cookbook, *Jikoni* by food writer Ravinder Bhogal. Bhogal is a writer of South Asian and African heritage, who runs a restaurant, *Jiknoi*, a no-borders kitchen in Marylebone, London. Bhogal's cookbook is relevant as it fits the narrative argued throughout this chapter – a South Asian heritage woman, dealing with food, gender, labour, and identity through her cooking. This cookbook serves as an example of a more contemporary writing to bring together the themes of this section on food and diaspora.

Jikoni – A Contemporary Cookbook

Bhogal's cookbook, *Jikoni*, is a selection of 'Proudly Inauthentic Recipes from an Immigrant Kitchen' – the tagline is immediately setting itself apart from the 'authentic' claims found in the previously mentioned cookbooks by Jaffrey's in 1973 and Sodha' in 2015. *Jikoni* starts with a definition of the word – kitchen in Kiswahili – spoken in Kenya, where Bhogal was born. She describes her upbringing, along with her heritage, as they both are crucial to her identity – she grew up in Nairobi after her Punjabi grandfather had settled in Kenya searching for work in the 1940s. Bhogal's introduction is an evocative recollection of place – Kenya is described as 'red-earthed' and as a 'blossoming landscape' – where her family made space for home.

> Mealtimes for a tribe that never seemed to stop breeding had to be handled with military precision, and every woman and girl was recruited to the cause, willingly or otherwise. I was a reluctant assistant to my mother, who had a stern approach to all domestic duties (Bhogal, 2020).

Bhogal's experience remains consistent with several participants in this research, all of whom had a strong sense of the gendered labour that made cooking and feeding at home a responsibility for women. For Bhogal, she found pleasure in food on trips to an ice-cream parlour with her grandfather. Her grandfather eventually bought her an aluminium stove, where she practised chapati making, which eventually led to a realisation that 'feeding someone made love expand' and she began to embrace the 'kitchen duties'. The kitchen, or the *jikoni*, is…

full of women confidently throwing a series of fragrant seeds and pods into pots, gossiping in a unique patois made up of several inherited tongues including Swahili, Punjabi, Gujarati, Urdu, Hindi and English.

Bhogal's 2020 cookbook is a contemporary example of the many themes discussed in this thesis. The migration from India to Kenya, the sensorial experience of a place through long, tropical rains, and the gendered expectation and the sensation of belonging with other women. It is tempting to critique 'kitchen duties' as a familiar and manipulative social structure that assumes these domestic tasks are a result of unconditional love, removing the 'labour' from the actual work as cooking becomes 'labour of love'. However, Bhogal sees it as 'feminine gospels' where recipes are known to every daughter. Bhogal also recognises the anxiety of gendered expectations passed through generations, and her ambivalence is communicated through words such as 'reluctance' and indignation towards the constraints experienced by growing up in a patriarchal Punjabi family.

> As I watched my grandmother, mother, aunts and sisters join the cult of domesticity, I felt restless, and inwardly rebelled at the drudgery of it all (Bhogal, 2020).

The kitchen has also been a space, as Bhogal writes, for her personal freedom, where cooking became a career 'rather than just a feminine duty' (ibid). Once Bhogal migrated to England, she describes homesickness as 'an ordeal', where she felt displaced and existing in 'suspended animation, carrying the burden of living between two worlds' (ibid). It is in her new environment where she describes nostalgia for the sensorial feelings of her old – 'for the smell of wet, red Kenyan earth'. As we have established in our study of diaspora, it is the feeling of neither here nor there, where in this instance, Bhogal, unable to put a time on how long it took for her to settle, still dreamt of returning to Kenya. Her nostalgia was of taste and smell of home, which eventually led to merging of their 'old and new worlds'.

> We occupied a hinterland where we fused new ingredients within our old traditions, unwittingly creating a new cuisine. Our recipes displayed a rebellious spirit – lawless concoctions that drew their influences from one nation and then another. We took the traditions of our ancestors and their regional home cooking and overlaid them with the reality of our new home and whatever its various food markets, delis, canteens and multicultural supermarkets had to offer on any given day. This is what I suppose could be loosely termed 'immigrant cuisine' (Bhogal, 2020).

What Bhogal calls 'immigrant cuisine' is emblematic of the hybridity of diaspora that has been established in the chapter. Similar to Bhogal's narrative, this chapter has unpacked scholarship on belonging, food and explored the narrative of diaspora to provide a foundation for the everyday. It is only through this choreographed understanding can we really make sense of the complexities of belonging for contemporary South Asian women in London. The politics of belonging needs to be critiqued to understand what belonging 'to' means in the everyday. Political inclusion does not guarantee belonging, nor does inclusion dismantle the hierarchies that are upheld by fitting the 'right' criteria. Belonging 'to' a place introduces an

anxiety of attachment, particularly for those of a diaspora as place often holds multiple meanings. A sense of attachment or detachment towards South Asian nations or the UK carries with it complex emotions. Diaspora is a condition of migration. It is a recognition of displacement. It is a nostalgia for a romanticised past, only made more precious by the exclusions felt in the present. Food is a powerful practice through which those in a diaspora work through their emotions of ambivalence – attachment, detachment, and more. For some of the participants, it can be seen as a rebellion of sorts – where embracing the hybridity, reimagining the 'feminine duty', and reimagining belonging is experienced by working through our everyday ambivalences.

3 Location, Location – Eating in East Ham

In one of the lunchtime conversations that forms the case studies and narrative core of this thesis, my companion and research participant AC – a woman in her late 20s who had settled in the UK from India some years ago – identified the moment when she felt a secure sense of belonging in this country. It was at her school workplace where, having previously merely brought slightly 'easy sandwiches or Western things' for lunch, AC decided to 'just turn up with a full-on Indian dinner', eat with her hands in front of others, and 'feel completely comfortable' while doing so. For my second participant in this case study, EG, reflects on her relationship with her Indian father and white British mother who met in activist circles, which instilled in her a similar passion of resistance, and claims, 'the best conversations always come back to food'. This simple, everyday practice of eating and discussing food – at once a basic necessity, an act of defiance, a performance of identity, and an instance of pleasure – distils the central research question and encompasses many of the keywords informing the rest of this thesis.

I aim to explore and explain the role of food in fostering a sense of a belonging for migrant and minority women in contemporary London. Comfort, othering, identity, participation, place, memory, and of course, food and belonging are some of the main concepts I deploy in this task. Propelling my research is the puzzle of why such a mundane, seemingly banal, and essential necessity like eating and drinking takes on such a powerfully political character for South Asian women in London today. What is it about these experiences that turns a mere act of social reproduction into one related to the politics of belonging? And importantly, who is this belonging for – a society that demands assimilation, or for the participant who does not need to prove their claim to belonging?

I met my participant, AC, at a beer shop on Brick Lane. AC overheard my conversation about a beer that tastes like yoghurt and reminded me of Indian raita, and excitedly agreed. A serendipitous encounter led to an organic conversation about food and Indian identity, which eventually led us to discussing belonging and everyday life. As the previous chapter outlines, literature on the politics of belonging presents a complex configuration of home, citizenship, rights and more. As such, the properties of belonging can be theorised across a number of disciplines – sociology, psychology, law, geography, and politics. Therefore, there are an exceptional number of scholarly works to help define and redefine belonging in academic scholarship. For the purpose of this thesis, I focus on the distinction made by Nira Yuval-Davis, who claims there is an important difference between belonging and the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Yuval-Davis's analytical framework describes belonging as 'emotional attachment' and feeling at 'home', which can become politicised when it is threatened. I have ruminated on this distinction and considered what belonging would mean for those who live in a state of generalised politicisation of their belonging – especially those for a diaspora, a condition that is itself political. In this chapter, I advance the study of food to examine this separation of politics, emotion, and belonging. The first interaction with AC was about food. This powerful tool to discuss identity, imbued with emotion, nostalgia, and a sense of agency, 'food plays a significant role in the social lives of diasporas' (Abbots cited in Klein and Watson, 2016). In my ethnography, I probe my research participants'

relationship with food, community, and place to learn if and how it contributes to their sense of belonging.

<u>The 'East Ham' Structure</u>

The larger structural framework, borrowed by Yuval-Davis, invites a deeper investigation into the separation of politics and belonging. Contemporary discussions on belonging are concerned with finding one's 'place' – the place of safety, comfort, and the ontological security of planning for one's future. The conversations on ontological security run a gamut of stable housing to financial security but for the focus here is on the home and spaces like it that 'provides refuge from an unsettled, potentially threatening world' (Mitzen, 2018). In this chapter, I set the scene of two interviews in East Ham, using the empirical findings to detail the emotional underpinnings of belonging, identity, and food that can help demonstrate the distinct ways in which we understand the emotional practice of belonging and the politics that informs it. By critically engaging with how literature has come to understand the politics of belonging and its innumerable definitions, I consider how AC and EG reflect on their own sense of belonging.

The East Ham case study demonstrates how the nature of the conversation over food organically introduces, subtly alludes to, and/or directly confronts complexities of the politics of belonging. As a result, there are two major narratives that are interwoven throughout this section – the participant's story and how it collides with the outside world of restaurant, food, and politics.

<u>What is Belonging?</u>

AC reflects on the transient nature of her belonging having grown up in two cities in India, and moving around in the UK and appreciates that 'code switching' is a skill she's developed in adapting throughout the various locations. Her code-switch is not only location dependent but also considers the culture or community in which she finds herself, and therefore exists within social relations that play a role in informing her identity (Keenan, 2015). While I discuss East Ham as a place of meaning in greater depth in the next section, what is important to highlight is the reflexive nature of belonging through interpersonal relationships and how AC '(came) to belong in a particular space by adopting certain practices and understandings' (ibid). For AC adopting food practices became a way of belonging to different spaces. Growing up in Gujarat as a Keralan, food in her home wasn't what she saw in her friend's place, who were eating *dal* and *roti* – she would often sneak off to visit her friends to sample a variety in her diet, different from her own home food that was predominantly South Indian and vegetarian. She says, 'growing up where you were not born, there is your own culture, an adopted culture, and here (in London) it's worse because home food now means too many things'. It's 'worse' because AC now has several cultures to consider, and her home has become more elastic than the seemingly singular place of home. There isn't a neat answer to what home means or where it is.

It can appear rather banal, but mostly difficult, to express the desire to belong – when prompted, AC said, 'because I want to fit in and feel secure?' While belonging may suggest connotations of comfort and safety, the other side of belonging considers the experiences of

(un)belonging and exclusion. In fact, the importance for AC was better understood through discussing lack of belonging. Floya Anthias suggests that 'it is precisely when we feel destabilised, when we seek for answers to the quandaries of uncertainty, disconnection, alienation, and invisibility that we become more obsessed with finding, even fixing, a social place that we feel at home in, or at least more at home with; where we seek for our imagined roots, for the secure haven of our group, our family, our nation writ large' (Anthias, 2006). For AC, the lack of belonging meant loneliness, isolation but also prompted an active and anxious attempt to combat such feelings – by understanding the differences in the culture of home and outside her physical home, AC would consciously consume such differences by opting for the *dal* and *roti* of her peers.

For EG, her sense of belonging is what she describes as 'elective', coming from a culturally diverse home that was not bound by one specific culture or a fixed baggage of said culture. She points out, 'if someone tells you to write your own identity from a collage of influences, none of which are burdened by expectation, that in itself can be a burden and you begin to question what your belonging actually is'. EG considers this to be a common modern experience in which there is no fixed or thick sense of home that previous generations seemed to cling on to. For EG, food can serve as an anchor that feels like home even if the anchor is beyond one specific place. The idea of 'thick' and 'thin' levels of attachment is another way of seeing belonging as a possession – where nationality or citizenship is a marker of 'thick' belonging to the state (Chin, 2019). However, EG does not consider this a useful way to express a sense of belonging to a place, as 'home' or spaces of belonging do not need to be defined in one singular way.

In the following sections, I discuss how AC and EG make sense of their belonging, the role of food in their narrative, and how East Ham served as a place of commensality in which to perform and discuss their identity.

Is Belonging Important?

Baumeister and Leary, 1995 in their seminal research demonstrate belonging as being a 'fundamental human motivation', citing Maslow's work in which 'love and belongingness needs' are found in the middle of his hierarchy of needs. The simplicity by which AC explains her belonging – something that comes across as a motivating factor – is furthered by her claim that belonging is 'always uncomfortable'. Her admission is an expression of cruel optimism – a desire for belonging, which to her means to 'fit in' – is both a desire and a recognition that it is uncomfortable. She has had to negotiate with that sense of cultural separation growing up in North India and eventually living in England with a further degree of separation from an assumed home of her heritage.

AC moved to England when she was 12 but initially claims that she didn't feel a great amount of culture shock when she first moved because living in Harrow, which she described as 'East Ham for Gujaratis and Punjabis', wasn't too different from being at 'home'. She felt like it mimicked a degree of separation she already felt in Gujarat being from South India. Food is something AC associates with home and one of the few things that, for a moment, erases confusion around her belonging. She shares –

> 'Belonging means what you want it to mean – it's a choice, not something you are forced to be. I am sure if my parents were to answer, they would say 'you belong to India'. My partner would strictly say you belong here. It would be a choice I make based on the time and convenience. I don't think there's any point in my life that I'll go back to India – so it won't be 'belonging' for me anymore. There are aspects of it, however, that will still feel like belonging. Indian food for example. It's an uncomfortable position to be in and that is belonging.'

The mediation of past, present, and future felt very apparent in her answer and as such, her construction of belonging isn't just a cognitive story but they 'reflect emotional investments and desire for attachments' (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Belonging, as articulated by AC, demonstrates a negotiation for what her belonging was, how her belonging changes based on 'convenience', how it is anticipated in the future, how others prescribe her belonging, and the 'symbols' of belonging through Indian food. However, 'not something you are forced to be' is a comment she contradicts throughout our conversation, because fitting in implied having to adopt a certain characteristic of value – the English accent, for example.

The 'uncomfortable' nature of belonging is a site of negotiation between AC's experience of competing worlds of the past (India), the present (UK), and the future (not India) and how her membership to these locations have varied, shifted, and changed over time. As AC describes what belonging means to her, she also expresses that longing for comfort – something that has always been a negotiation in her upbringing as she moved across cities and countries. The longing, therefore, isn't something that she has organically felt, but worked towards – in her stories, she presents her ambivalence by describing this place of comfort as both a destination, and a recognition that belonging will always be 'uncomfortable'. ACs' mother moved to Gujarat from Kerala in the hope for a better job and financial security, the same reasons that compelled her to relocate to the UK. In their travels, there was a longing to 'arrive' to a place that became an idealised fantasy. Gurminder Bhambra suggests that this longing is rooted not only in desire but felt 'historically emergent' as colonised countries were believed to follow the path of modernity like the West (Bhambra, 2009). For AC, reflecting on the colonial relationship between the UK and India remains a difficult subject when considering her belonging – something I'll address in the following sections.

EG's negotiation of her belonging was informed by the political environment in which she was raised. 'My parents rebelled massively against their backgrounds and expectations of the cultures from which they came, and I am a product of that'. EG believed that with age, and moving away from where she grew up in Birmingham, she was able to make her own belonging as she found her sense of self. While she attributes her belonging to the different places that she's found home, she expresses certain factors that can evoke different parts of her identity – food and places she has lived being central to her articulation.

While I provide similarities and contrasts to how both AC and EG express their belonging, their narratives exemplify the contrast between belonging and the politics of belonging. By this, I am referring to the public discourse and the mass culture rhetoric on belonging as highlighted in the introduction. The desire to belong as an emotional need, but what is this belonging 'to'? In the following section, I refer back to the current literature in the politics of

belonging to examine how food serves as both a tool to differentiate between identities and place and how food places can serve as a site where such discussions of ambivalence take shape and produce a 'counter-space' of belonging.

The Politics of Belonging

Emily Grabham suggests 'belonging refers to the location of an object or a person in its "proper place"' (Grabham, cited in Keenan, 2015). Keenan expands on this and describes belonging 'as the state of fitting smoothly, or without trouble, into either a conceptual category or a material position. It is necessarily a relational term; an object/subject/practice/part that belongs cannot exist in a vacuum, it must belong to or with something else' (ibid). Taking these definitions into account, a few major claims are made – that there is a 'proper place' of belonging, that the desire of belonging is for a 'smooth fit', and that it is a *practice*. In AC's narrative, when her place – as a result of her identity – hasn't been deemed 'proper' and the fit is uncomfortable, the lack of belonging was obvious and required she behave in a way to secure her feelings of belonging. For EG, belonging is about being able to practice her sense of self. Their difference in articulation is a reflection of their positionality – for EG, who was born in the UK versus AC, who migrated to the UK as a teenager. AC feels the need to negotiate based on her assumed 'otherness', whereas EG, the negotiation is a practice of her own sense of identity, regardless of ethnicity.

AC claims some of her adopted practices were an attempt to make her feel able to *smoothly fit* in the UK. Nowadays, these practices occur more organically and are automatic having lived in the UK for so many years – adapting her language, clothes, culture, and more mundane things of everyday life – all which have contributed to her identity as a British-Asian woman. This hyphenated identity was important to AC because it involves a community in which she has come to feel accepted, distinct from a solely British identity. If belonging denotes the comfort of a fit, identities are what makes the subject of belonging more complex. One distinction put forward by Anthias is to think of identity as a possession and belonging as a process. However, Gurminder Bhambra suggests that 'identity-making always involves a construction, rather than merely a discovery, of difference' and should be understood not as something owned or possessed by individual or collective actors but rather as 'a mobile, often unstable relation of difference' (Bhambra, 2009). AC attributes a conscious change in her belonging when her identity was something she felt more confident in. The process and possession, in this instance, are acting on one another. AC now feels like she wants to incorporate her Indian identity because it brings her joy. She gives an example of how uncomfortable she used to feel taking the day off for Diwali, a religious holiday she enjoyed celebrating in India. This year, she made a conscious decision to observe the holiday and request time off work. The hesitation to do so in the past came across as a need to hide aspects of her 'otherness', her Indian-ness, as a way to fit in – a difference of identity from her peers. AC eventually realised making space for her 'difference' was now becoming an easy way for her to feel as if she belonged, as if she were the same as the other teachers. To celebrate Diwali this year, AC spent the day making sweets that are traditional to the holiday and called the process of doing so cathartic. She shares a recipe of making *barfi* and enjoyed

how simple it felt to practice her belonging and simultaneously her identity as a British-Asian woman.

EG reflects on her mixed-race identity through connections rather than a simple possession. 'Food has been the most regular and consistent connection to the Asian part of my identity,' she claims, even though she grew up around a lot of South Asians, her experience wasn't of a singular Asian community. Her dad's family is Sikh and lived in Slough while she grew up in a predominantly working-class Pakistani Muslim community. 'The way my parents raised me is also very different – my dad's family live in a traditional familial structure where most of the kids still live at home and of course, my mum isn't Indian, but she was very aware of having a mixed-race child and would send me to Punjabi childminders. But food remained the strongest tie since I've always eaten Indian food and continue to'. To borrow Bhambra's words again, 'identity-making involves a construction' – food is that property that attaches EG to her culture and makes her feel connected to her heritage. This felt particularly salient for EG who revealed the lack of education in the British system about the history of colonialism or what it means for her identity even if the school she went to was two thirds majority South Asian.

EG further explains that while her parents were very political and she grew up in a politicised environment, they never 'sat me down and gave me a history lesson about my Punjabi or Indian identity, which was a bit frustrating because my dad is a historian and I wish he had imparted more so now I feel like I have a gap in my knowledge and as an adult, I'm racing to catch up'. Although, EG questions whether her family who 'are fully Indian, from India', would have a deep historical understanding of their identity either. EG emphasises again the construction of her identity rather than a discovery of her mixed-race appearance where she identifies with the label of British-Asian and has come to understand the complex relationship through the political, legal, and everyday struggles experienced by the community. She claims her 'identity is shaped by the legacy of what happened after people (Indians) migrated here. I don't feel tied to an Indian identity that pre-existed my family's arrival in the UK because I wasn't raised in a traditional way, but my identity is shaped by what happened after'. She clarifies that she doesn't hold any attachment to the 'British' part of that label either, seeing it as just a nationality, which has little relevance to how she makes sense of her belonging. The 'politics' of belonging, for her, is not about the legal nor bordered definition of citizenship, but the practice of one's multilayered identity that leans heavily on culture and activist values. However, the criteria of a legal fit does not suit someone who was born in the country, so her definition of belonging does not rely on a legal pursuit of rights.

For AC, certain events trigger and reinforce an internalised belief that her belonging remains uncomfortable and will never feel fully authentic. She adds, 'It's based on years of *you* (the British) having come over and taken people away or displaced them and made them feel alien in their own country and then went away and made it hard for us to come over. It's the whole history of trouble and I'm now profiting from it in a way and being here and contributing.' Her feeling of complicity adds to her ambivalence about her belonging to both the UK and

India. It is not an easy position to oscillate between, which echoes her statement that belonging will always be uncomfortable.

AC's comment on who is 'us' and 'them' reinforced a negotiation of her identity and how that influences her political belonging, especially settling in the UK. AC's tone visibly changes from one of comfort when she is sharing stories of commensality compared to when she is describing a kind of colonial nostalgia that connects to a legacy of trauma. As I'll describe in the following chapter, history does not remain in the past and has its roots in the everyday experience. For AC, it is clear that she remains an outsider in many regards. However, it is the desire of the smooth fit, again, where she negotiates with what it means to practice being an 'insider' – how to be 'British'.

> 'When I was younger, wanting to fit in, feel more desirable – especially with dating, you almost want to – this is a horrible thing to say, but I never went for Indian guys because I wanted to distance myself from them so much that the normal inclination was to go for white guys. It's always around, you're constantly thinking about it even when you're not. Even the choice to marry my partner (who is white) is to be one step away from India and I don't regret it, but it is still there. There are amazing things that can come out from an interracial marriage but there are things I always worry about losing – talking about colonialism though is what I find insanely annoying is when the spin is 'we did good things in India too. But we gave you trains. I am sure other countries got trains without you!' It is such a bizarre thing. I think my partner's parents have some of the older, imperial thoughts of 'we did good in India!'

AC describes a tension between a maintenance of an Indian identity that, at times, can be at odds with an identity she has built with her partner – a hybrid identity that cannot always coexist in harmony. The negotiation of identity, or identities AC ruminates on, makes her question what *being* British means – the 'us' versus 'them', especially within an intimate relationship with her partner. She finds comfort in expressing her Indianness through food and increasingly in eating Indian food in public with a level of confidence and comfort necessary to do so. In some situations where AC needed to choose to be either one or the other, which meant some aspect of identity needed to be dormant. AC describes a recurring scenario when her family would travel back to India and how dressing in a salwar kameez would allow her to immediately put herself in the Indian mindset, and to make life easier. They would carry bulky suitcases in the London Underground and AC remembers people being reluctant to help them. However, the reverse is true when they were returning to the UK in jeans and a t-shirt and realising people were more likely to help bring heavy suitcases up the stairs. These everyday examples are what contribute to the feelings of ambivalence – they are just as much part of her sense of belonging, or lack thereof.

It is useful to reflect on the work of Jean Duruz, Arjun Appadurai, and other scholars like them that critique the stagnant nature of identity (Appadurai, 1990; Duruz, 2005). The shifting, fluid and flexible property of identity is a response to the changing location of place and the ability one has to host a variety of the 'self' or as AC calls it, 'code switching'. It does mean that identity is not invulnerable to long stages of dormancy or loss and needs to be activated. To simplify it would be to say that this conflict or ambivalence is objectively bad,

which isn't the case, especially in AC's perspective who sees her multiple belonging as a good thing – something that gives her flexibility. However, the paradox of a multiple identity and belonging can be challenged when there is an absence of comfort in spaces that create a vulnerability of difference, perpetuated in racist encounters. Les Back, in conversation with Luke de Noronha, talks about the shifting nature of racism, quoting Frantz Fanon, 'racism doesn't exclude absolutely – it shifts, it orders; that was the colonial reality, and the postcolonial form of that process has some of the echoes of those alignments of power; the 'good immigrant' as opposed to the unwanted' (Back and De Noronha, 2021). Feeling the gaze of others while wearing traditional Indian dress is failing to uphold what a 'good immigrant' does to blend in, something that felt recognisable to AC the moment her physical appearance made her seem less British – her parallel life was made visible. To emphasise the multicultural question and Anthias' and Keenan's point – how do such encounters maintain or regulate power relations and what is the impact it has on AC's feeling of her authentic belonging to the UK?

National Belonging

As mentioned in Chapter 2, multiculturalism has been necessarily critiqued as 'neglecting issues of power between and within minority ethnic communities, of reifying and essentialising boundaries of difference and of excluding the growing number of migrants and asylum-seekers who come from outside the former British empire' (Yuval-Davis, 2011). This is exactly one of the problems with championing Braverman and Sunak as examples of multiculturalism, as if difference is now commonplace and racism has been thwarted. Sara Ahmed furthers such 'positive' words like multiculturalism by examining diversity in higher education as 'a kind of yes politics that encourages people to do something rather than a no politics that aims to prevent people from doing something' (Ahmed, 2012). This sentiment forces us to consider how we position belonging politically. Ahmed's critique of diversity examines the way in which a positive spin on a subject inherently subtracts from the substantial undertakings and the processes that are necessary to correct the structural inequalities. "If it is detached from scary issues, such as power and inequality, it is harder for diversity to do anything in its travels' (ibid). Ahmed's interview with a practitioner demonstrates the impact of a positive spin on the word and task such as diversity. She says, 'it just kind of allows people to get away with thinking 'oh everybody's different,' and really kind of ignoring barriers which are oppressing, because if you look at everybody as an individual then you can take away the fact that there is institutional racism, sexism, disability-ism, etc., within a university' (ibid). Belonging as a political project lends itself to a similar appeal – it holds a positive property, to belong is something we desire, as AC described, to feel 'secure'. The positive project of belonging becomes the cruel optimism of everyday life, where belonging becomes about fighting for inclusion. Which, as demonstrated, does not dismantle actual structural inequalities, but rather reinforces the struggle of belonging for those deemed the 'other'.

This 'feel good' politics of belonging makes it seem as if there is a *place* that is waiting to be occupied, where one has overcome their political struggle and racism through some action by the individual – a performance of cruel optimism. Keenan employs Doreen Massey's

understanding of space, the second space being a 'sphere of possibility for the existence of multiplicity' and the third space as 'always under construction… because space is the product of interrelations, space is never finished or closed' (Massey cited in Keenan, 2015). I understand the space between AC feeling the push and pull of belonging as both a possibility (second space) for that security she craved and a site of construction (third space) in which her choice (wearing jeans and a t-shirt on the London Underground versus a traditional salwar kameez) can influence whether that space be comfortable or uncomfortable and how she feels about which identity she chooses to express. AC's mental map of space and behaviour, as informed by such experiences and others, influences the daily decisions she makes – something as everyday as which clothes to wear (England and Simon, 2010).

AC's desire to fit in and feel secure, as she initially describes belonging, is beyond the legal security of holding a British passport. Inderpal Grewal discusses this by unpacking 'the American Dream' where 'national belonging was made to seem possible for immigrants because the consumer citizenship through which that dream is achieved seemed unbound from territory, race and class' (Grewal 2005 cited in Keenan, 2015). Grewal suggests that to be American, beyond claiming the identity of a national belonging, also 'encompasses the varied perspectives, feelings, beliefs, and desires' (ibid). Ahmed believes the invitation on offer by the state is also rooted in this idea of proximity – to have the opportunity to assimilate, bear great resemblance and likeness to what is the 'norm' and therefore, what is comfortable – for example, AC choosing to eat what her peers were eating for school lunches, often a sandwich, something she says is not 'technically a real lunch' for her. 'The word "comfort" suggests well-being and satisfaction, but it can also suggest ease and easiness. Comfort is about an encounter between bodies and worlds, the promise of a "sinking" feeling. If white bodies are comfortable, it is because they can sink into spaces that extend their shape' (Ahmed, 2012). The opposite, of course, would be the failure to assimilate and therefore causing discomfort that can be described as 'a restlessness and uneasiness, a fidgeting and twitching, is a bodily registering of an expected arrival' (ibid). The onus is on the individual that is perpetuating the discomfort by 'not fulfilling an expectation of whiteness' (ibid). For AC, the turning point of feeling the desire to fit in to expressing both aspects of her identity came from the act of eating, sharing, and preparing Indian food.

The Role of Food and Eating Practices in Restaurants

In this section, I consider belonging and the role of food in AC and EG's narrative of their identity and sense of belonging. The main task here is to highlight two major arguments that enable us to reimagine belonging as a political project –

1. The South Asian foodways in the UK described by AC and EG presents a similar framework where the emotional attachment to food occurs within a politicised food structure of South Asian food – how it is perceived, evolved – that reveals political, economic, gender, and racial divisions and cohesion. The relationship both participants have with food, however, became a way to facilitate a construction and consumption of an everyday British-Asian identity that was meaningful to AC and EG.

2. The importance of site – be that physically rooted and/or not consistently stagnant, the act of commensality (in the participants personal lives and in our conversations) transforms spaces into a place of belonging.

Using these two points, I argue that food does not neglect political inequalities and boundaries, however, food allows for a negotiation of identity. This process is not without its own complexities and negative attachments. However, there is a potential in expressing belonging and identity through food, of creating a counter-space of belonging. AC and EG selected two restaurants, both in East Ham. The place and restaurant become two important sites for how they articulate their anxieties, dissent, and belonging through food.

<u>Neighbourhood and the Restaurant</u>

AC picked first the neighbourhood and then restaurant, and without hesitation said, 'East Ham – it's not going to be authentic elsewhere'. AC is in her late twenties, currently living in East London, and working in a school. EG is a recent doctoral graduate who was born in Southall and raised in Birmingham. Her father is Indian Punjabi-British, and her mum is white and British. EG describes her mixed-race heritage as British-Asian and heavily influenced by the neighbourhood of Birmingham. AC describes herself as British-Asian and while she and EG have rather different experiences, East Ham was a distinguished place in their life in the UK.

East Ham, part of the Newham Borough, is an important site for South Asians. Seafarers from South Asia, the Caribbean, East and West Africa, arrived at the Royal Victoria Docks, carrying goods across the British Empire. The lascars who settled in the borough were either there for several months at a time or were abandoned by shipping companies, which meant the place was a space of transience, of in-betweenness. The borough became a place of 'help and support, places where communities were built. However, they were often also places of control and coercion, where authorities could attempt to dominate this new population'.[19] East Ham became a place of diaspora, full of such contradictions of a built community, and of difference.
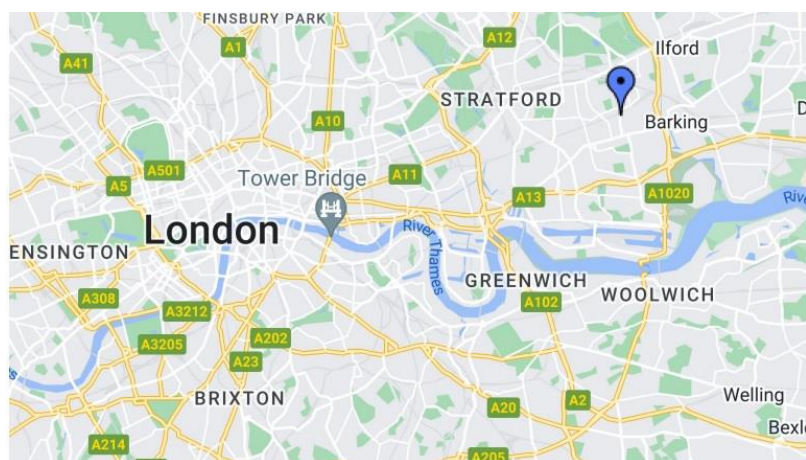
The blue marker shows East Ham's location in London. East Ham sits in Zone 3+4 via public transportation.

Image: Google Map, East Ham Available at: https://maps.app.goo.gl/VCfcLBRrCPHdf HZr9

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[19] Thames Festival Trust | Places Of Change | Thames Festival Trust (no date) *Places of change*, *Thames Festival Trust*. Available at: https://thamesfestivaltrust.org/heritage-programme/places-of-change/ (Accessed: 19 October 2023).

The restaurant AC picked, Udaya Kerala, is a stand-out in East Ham. It is included on a list published by Vittles, an online food, culture, and politics magazine, of the 60 Best South Asian restaurants in London. Vittles claims 'East Ham is full of dishes which, if they were elsewhere in London or in a different restaurant, would be lauded as some of the city's best' (Nunn *et al.*, 2021). This sentiment seems to be shared by EG who lived in East Ham for a few months years ago. While she describes herself as a meat-eater, EG is adamant on visiting only one restaurant in East Ham, Taste of India (Veg). 'The non-veg one isn't nearly as good'. Both AC and ER have an intimate memory of the neighbourhood, yet it is not a place they frequent as often as they once did. The distance, nonetheless, retains an emotional intimacy that can be revisited – physically separate from their current lives, yet a treat whenever an opportunity presents itself.

My initial visit to East Ham, prior to this interview, was a surprise re-entry to my own 'past' – a feeling of South Asia, apparent as soon as you arrive. This specific feeling was reinforced by AC as her first words when we met outside the East Ham station were, 'Welcome to India!' The sensorial recognition that there are identifiable smells, sounds, sights, even if it were not a known place of home. Udaya Kerala, a ten-minute walk away from the station, sits somewhere in the residential parts of East Ham. In the following chapter, I describe a walk through the high street of Southall which registers at all different sensories to inspire a feeling of home. Heavily fuelled by nostalgia, the walk from East Ham station to Udaya Kerala does something similar. We walked past homes that had a familiar smell and sound – you could hear a variety of South Asian languages being spoken and the aroma from people's kitchen made the physical street a symbolic and collective memory of a home. This sense of familiarity was reminiscent of Asma Khan's Chef's Table episode. In the episode, Asma details her loneliness and isolation as an immigrant, away from her own country. During a walk, she encountered the smell of *parathas* from someone's kitchen which immediately inspired a sense of home and a desire to cook. For AC and me, it was preparing us to eat.

EG and I met at Taste of India (Veg) that was right by the temple AC would eventually point out. The restaurant, similar to Udaya Kerala, seems to be full of families enjoying their lunch. However, Udaya Kerala doesn't 'look like a restaurant'; AC says the layout reminds her of someone's home, a living room that has been converted. In Miranda-Nieto and Boccagni's research of Ecuadorian restaurants in Madrid, they emphasise the domestication of such restaurants where there is 'continuity and elicitation of pre-migration life patterns and meaningful memories associated with the country of origin, as well as the production of familiarity and intimacy in the present' (Miranda-Nieto and Boccagni, 2020). The intimacy is apparent in this restaurant through their use of 'material arrangements' – the space is arranged to 'become a site for family life' and transforms space to 'a niche in which the domestic 'drips' onto the semi-public'(ibid). The restaurant was off the main East Ham roads and tucked in between homes, which made AC's observation even more fitting.

Udaya Kerala is a modest sized restaurant with fewer than ten or twelve tables. Many of the other diners in the restaurant were families, with young children at almost every table. The environment felt intimate and while we were dining separately, it also felt as if we were

dining together, performing commensality in a semi-public space. This feeling reshaped the boundaries of public and private where the restaurant felt like the extension of home itself. It's a space that facilitates the recollection of memories (Mata-Codesal, 2010' Sabar & Posner, 2013 cited in Miranda-Nieto and Boccagni, 2020). There is a transportive, dual sense to this recollection of both the 'home' country as an imagined, public community and your private life within it – a 'connection between what have been called 'small stories' and 'micro-histories' and an imagined 'macro context' (Cameron 2012 cited (Flowers and Swan, 2017). The restaurant deepens the sensorial experience of walking in a diasporic neighbourhood and becomes a space where all the senses, including taste, are engaged.

Taste of India shared some qualities with Udaya Kerala in its minimalist décor. However, it differed in its domesticity – it didn't remind EG of dining at home but was a dedicated experience of dining out; the booths in the restaurant giving a different kind of privacy compared to the open dining table environment of Udaya. East Ham and Taste of India were inseparable, and often the only reason to visit the neighbourhood for EG. While having dined at other restaurants in East Ham, EG only comes back to this one place. 'My dad was hosting a few Pakistani musicians, and they were going to be in East London, and I suggested we go to this restaurant and my dad thought they would be really pissed off if we took them to a vegetarian restaurant, but he trusted me, and they ended up loving it'. The restaurant is the 'third space', 'something other than either domestic spaces or workplaces and are argued to be essential for community building and public sociality. In the case of restaurants, they incorporate elements of both commercial activities and non-commercial domesticity, and thus are somewhere in between public and private' (Sammells and Searles, 2016). The importance of this third space is upheld by EG's routine and where her South Asian cultural identity emerges.

Udaya Kerala creates an ambiance where dining in a regional 'Indian' context is made more obvious in comparison to Taste of India. Holding these two places in contrast reveals a different approach to how food and its surroundings are being used to communicate an identity. A big wall in Udaya was covered by a huge painting of a river and coconut trees, a major part of the landscape of Kerala. There are other pieces of pottery and wall hangings that are symbolic of the state and such emblems affirm the culture of the state aesthetically. Udaya Kerala can be considered an 'identitarian' restaurant, where the 'restaurant seems to embody a claim for recognition of a country and membership to it, directed towards an arena of clients expected to appreciate this nationalistic ambience no less than the food in itself' (ibid). The culture and identity are reified through the atmosphere in the restaurant as much as it is in the food. The connection, therefore, between food and place is palpable, but also by extension, the restaurant is offering a narrative of 'authenticity' 'through references to place-specific products' (Hedegaard, 2013).

As you enter Taste of India, there is a bar/counter with some popular Indian desserts and fruits, including *barfi*, *gulab jamun*, and *ladoo*. There are fewer symbols of any particular place or region within India – as its name intends, an all-encompassing depiction of 'India'. For EG, this is the restaurant for food and not a space in which you spend hours with your friends or family and are looking to pay for an experience. There is a utility this place offers

her, and it is in food entirely, different from chain restaurants where the main commodity you are buying isn't food but places to sit and, as EG claims, 'have a nice cocktail that is a luxurious experience'. While the approach for both places in their aesthetic may be different, the language being spoken and shared amongst the diners and staff was similar. It was the 'intimate ways of talking and expressing oneself, certain forms of entertainment and eating constitute activities increasingly performed in public that carry traces of their private character' (Miranda-Nieto and Boccagni, 2020).

A diasporic sense of identity was being affirmed by both the food on offer and the restaurant. However, what Taste of India suggests through its decor is a restaurant and its food that offers both a sense of place, India, yet a place-less identity, with no regional specificity. There is a sense of 'Indian' food, with some regionality in the menu, yet it is also food that 'could be produced and consumed anywhere in the world' (Hedegaard, 2013). as we dine in East London. While the same can be argued for Udaya Kerala – food that is produced and consumed outside of Kerela, it's aesthetic suggests a concrete place of the Indian state. As covered in the previous chapter, the different *scapes* or cultural flows are acting on one another to produce an experience – the forces of migration, trade, globalisation, and more gives way to a tension between place and de-territorialisation. It is this sense of ambivalence, again, that 're-configures the ties between place, cultural production and ideologies' (Appadurai 1996, cited Hedegaard, 2013), where diners like AC and EG live their connection of food and place, yet maintain their hybrid identity to many places at once.

On our table at Udaya Kerala, there is K*erala chicken fry, Borotta, Kerala chicken curry, Kerala mutton curry*, and *sambar*. The meal ends with masala chai and a conversation on the meaning of 'curry'. AC's definition of curry is 'it is not rice, and it has a watery substance in it.' She does not refer to many things as 'curry' because it is not suitable for the specific food items she is likely to consume at home. AC carries on, 'we normally have rice, side bits (whatever vegetable) and the 'curry' is something that has liquid in it. Curry here (as English people use it) is very odd.' To AC, describing 'British' curry means describing an entire evening of 'meal' you're going to eat at an Indian restaurant – 'to have a curry', something that was initially unfamiliar to AC. To preface this, and what will be discussed elsewhere, curry invokes the same importance of language and word choice when describing food. Curry, with origins in India, also has meaning in other parts of the world from Malaysia to Jamaica. Its popularity in British culture was the focus of our conversation as it not only informs the very food (a variety of dishes that is) itself but produces an image of an evening – either out or for a takeaway. Our dialogue consists mostly of the habits AC encounters when dining with English friends, where English means white, while British, she clarifies is 'everyone who lives here'. The routine of papadums, chutneys, and ordering both bread and rice, for example, are what stand out to AC as being unique to and with the company of white friends than when eating with others in the South Asian diaspora, particularly with family. AC says the only exception of 'bread and rice' together is at the end of meals, as 'South Indians are attached to their rice, they might end with a tiny bit of rice. They would eat what we did (*borotta*) and at the very end, they'll have a bit of *rasam* and a little bit of rice'.

For EG, whatever is on a curry house menu is the be-all and end-all of Indian food for her white peers. She says, 'I have a lot of non-Asian friends who have never heard of dosa since South Indian food isn't entrenched in British food culture the same way popular items of North Indian cuisine is. And I am North Indian, so I do like that food, but it's often made very heavy in restaurants', she says. EG confines her experience of curry houses to Birmingham specifically, where her mum's home is close to the famous Balti Triangle. She informs me of a trend in the last 10-15 years in the West Midlands that saw several pubs closing doors eventually taken over by Indian families who continued to operate it as a pub but with the additional offering of Indian food. EG says these 'Desi pubs' began to pop up particularly in working class areas and have great food and often compete to see which Desi pub has the best mixed grill. When she and her family eat out, these pubs are often their choice, especially given grilled meats are often what they would eat out, as they are harder to replicate at home. The commensality in these desi pubs were also a unique dining out experience, in contrast to the curry house, and felt uniquely part of Midlands culture.

EG's association with home food and restaurant food is similar to that of AC's – there are certain food choices you make based on the location. AC is sceptical of making a choice that could potentially ruin the memory of a dish, stating,

> 'A lot of things I associate with home is food but it's almost like I don't seek them out anymore because it feels like I am tainting my nan's memory. If I see a particular dish that I associate with her, I don't order it. I would rather my mum make it because it just feels more authentic to me that way.'

EG tells me about her experience ordering Indian food where her mum's side of the family lives in Suffolk. The *paneer* they ordered was in fact cubes of cheddar in a curry. When they confronted the restaurant, the owners simply replied 'locals don't like the real thing, so this is the way we serve paneer to make it more palatable for our customers'. EG chalks this up to the lack of diversity in that particular town, with few to no brown people.

The attachment to the respective restaurants in East Ham became clearer as these were places that upheld their memory and expectations. The food here did not sanitise home food to meet local taste, but the food and the restaurant established and re-established their culinary nostalgia. Importantly, they were not the homogenised menus they are most likely to get in their respective neighbourhoods.

South Asian food in the UK

AC's understanding of her identity as a British-Asian woman had interesting parallels to our conversation about Indian food in the UK, which she describes as 'a mixed bag where some are really good and others less so'. AC's initial assessment of belonging – a desire to fit in and feel secure, was later defined as 'whatever you want it to be'. AC then considers how she practises belonging through food – all these ruminations are an example of negotiation and working through positions of ambivalence, something that is reflected in her relationship with food. It is also reflected of the stories she shares – the desire to fit in is a comment on the larger 'English' society. 'Whatever you want' is a recognition of her hybrid ability to code-

switch, and the practice of belonging through food is when many of the negotiations are happening subconsciously between how she expresses her identity.

AC says there are things you can get here that she's never had in India. For example, a place in Salisbury by the Cathedral is an unassuming South Indian restaurant where AC had a jackfruit curry, something she had never had previously even though jackfruit is commonly found in South India. Native to Kerala, jackfruit sold in the UK, particularly at places like Borough Market, has seen prices increase to £160. Sejal Sukhadwala, a food writer, commented on this gentrification of 'an ordinary ingredient which people in Asia, the Caribbean and African countries use on a daily basis' (Morrissy-Swan, 2022). Not only does this make a common ingredient for many dishes exclusive and pricey, but it also becomes part of a 'trend' fit for critique.

Food writer for The Guardian, Zoe Williams, dedicated an article to describe the jackfruit as a 'spectacularly ugly, smelly, unfarmed, unharvested pest-plant native to India. Some people ate it, but only if they had nothing better to eat'. Sukhadwala's response to this summarises the way in which food (and food writers) face the same tone-deaf and racist remarks of food minority communities have always heard. 'This is what food writers of colour are up against. If I wanted to write about Keralan jackfruit dumplings steamed in fresh bay leaves, most editors would reject it – 'too niche'. Yet this breathtakingly lazy, ignorant, and embarrassing nonsense gets published' (ibid). The article by Williams demonstrates not only ignorance but fulfils a few tropes of Western encounters with anything 'other'. From the 'discovery' of jackfruit in a Starbucks wrap, she manages to de-contextualise the heritage of the vegetable or its significance in culinary history or culture. Moreover, the choice of words matters – referring to something as 'ugly' or 'smelly' perpetuates a stereotype long associated with Indian food. Such food can't be elevated, and the food becomes an extension of rhetoric like 'uncivilised', 'backwards', and eerily like the language of colonialism all together. I'll return to both the topics on food vernacular and culinary appropriation in future chapters – in chapter 4, Southall, and in chapter 5, my interview with chefs.

AC briefly talks about 'nicer' places that have jackfruit on their menus now as a nod to the growing trend of veganism as highlighted above. She claims that such good food, like the jackfruit curry, is 'never in a famous restaurant' and talks of her experience with curry houses.

> 'Over the years, I have found things that I don't think are that bad at curry houses – they are also Bangladeshi and not Indian so I would go for Bangladeshi food like chicken raga. I am trying to find authenticity in a place that probably doesn't have it'.

AC struggles with her admission of the word 'authentic' – something she already has claimed about East Ham as a whole – and moves beyond our conversation on curry houses to the more 'posh' or posh-leaning chains like Dishoom. While they may be closer to 'Indian' food than a curry house, AC thinks it suffers from a different type of inauthenticity particularly when they claim to do the opposite.

Our conversation about Dishoom led me to a blog titled 'The White Pube', a collaborative effort of two writers who publish on a variety of topics to offset the average publications

geared towards and written by predominantly 'middle class white men'. The article that caught my attention was boldly titled 'I HATE DISHOOM' – in all capital letters. The writer takes issue with what she calls 'a move of contemporary Indian street foods' that are concentrated in Zone 1 and high streets in large UK cities and 'does a specific thing in the history of Indian food in the UK' (Muhammad, 2020). The author, Zarina Muhammad, details the role of curry houses as being a fixture in the colonial historical relationship of the UK and India, where the food was 'subservient to British taste'. The curry houses, she argues, were facing pressures of assimilation, where British taste had a role in shaping the food they could provide. This power dynamic, initially imbued with the distinct racism of Enoch Powell's Rivers of Blood speech and more, eventually saw a 'Blaritie multiculturalism', in which food served as a nod of symbolic change in cultural relations. Muhammad's critiques and scepticism are concerned with how such 'Modern Indian Street food' follows a similar subjugation only this time, the socio-political context is that of 'vague tolerance'. Chapter 5, in Southall, covers the expansion of street food more closely.

EG also brings up Dishoom as an example when comparing our experience at Taste of India, where the focus us on the food and not the ambiance. She shares Muhammad's critique of a 'weird colonial nostalgia' that she finds odd but something kitschy that sells. She thinks back to a restaurant she visited in Delhi and recalls it being a famous coffee shop, bar/restaurant hybrid where the food was delicious, but the ambiance was doing a similar thing to Dishoom. They augmented a colonial nostalgia that not only felt strange in Delhi but was also much pricier for the quality of food that would be much cheaper in the neighbouring restaurants.

The identitarian choices at Dishoom are hard to miss. On my only visit to the Shoreditch branch, I found myself sitting next to framed pictures of South Asian families that seemed to serve a predominantly aesthetic purpose. Black and white photos of women in a salwar kameez, retro adverts – all which make up a stylish, art deco-like interior. Dishoom's website has a section titled 'Design Journal Entries' that details the purposeful intention of telling stories of the Irani-style cafes in Bombay and eventually Mumbai through their interior decor. The journal entries capture the experiences of being present at such cafes in the past. One of their entries reads, 'the stories are truly touching: one contributor remembers a poorer customer pouring their chai into a saucer to share it with a friend'.[20] The shared space where people of different backgrounds encounter one another is part of a colonial history that is captured in public spaces, like the cafes in Bombay. The replication in Dishoom, therefore, is a reflection of memories that are not always pleasant or positive but also a commentary on the difference of class in Colonial India. This can render the aesthetic as an uncomfortable clash of colonial history and of class as AC, EG and Muhammad claim.

Saadia Toor, however, interprets this as 'a change in how India and its inhabitants are now 'imagined' or represented on the world stage… which includes vestiges of past representations refashioned into what I call the new – one is tempted to say *ersatz* –

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[20] "The London Design Festival at Dishoom Shoreditch: From Bombay with Love." *At Dishoom Shoreditch | From Bombay with Love*, https://www.dishoom.com/journal/dishoom-at-the-london-design-festival/.

Orientalism and what the New York Times has recently referred to as 'the new Indo-chic' (Toor, 2002). Toor goes further to imply that 'the new generation of hyphenated Indians is increasingly looking toward the home country in its quest for identity and is also partly responsible for shaping the Indo-chic aesthetic' (ibid). Dishoom represents both an exotic, yet modern approach to a particular style of not just Indian food and cooking, but also of India itself that is equally modern as the interior design and decor in the restaurant suggests.

Toor attributes this aesthetic as a characteristic of capitalism, especially in postcolonial India, which reveals a relationship between class habitus and taste (ibid). Lisa Heldke, in her book *Exotic Appetites* discusses similar notions of middle-class Americans who consume 'ethnic foods' as an act of 'food adventuring' as a project of 'pursuing status distinction and cultural capital' (Heldke cited in Flowers and Swan, 2017). Heldke also believes such 'white colonial practice of exploiting the Other' can 'abstract the presence of ethnic food from historical and political context' (ibid). For example, the server at Dishoom tells us the menu is like 'tapas' and we should order several plates. The fancy cocktails were made 'Indian' by the presence of a bay leaf as a nod to Indian cosmopolitanism but adds fuel to the debate of what is 'authentically' Indian. EG feels sceptical about deeming something as authentic or inauthentic because both are based on assumptions. What diners find in Indian restaurants in the UK may be 'inauthentic' in the same way restaurants in India may serve 'English' food. EG shares,

> 'I try not to apply (authenticity) too much to dining and food because – is this the food you would get back home? In some ways yes, in some ways, no? You may not get all of these things in one menu. They're also appealing to different audiences – like Dishoom – maybe it is recreating what these cafes were like at some point, I have no idea.'

A Guardian article details the identitarian feature of places like Dishom as an example of a 'wave of colonial nostalgia as Britons time-travel to the era when the people of this rain-soaked dot in the dismal north Atlantic raped, traded, pillaged and murdered their way to running the biggest empire the world has ever seen. And today's bankable nostalgia, if that's what it is, focused on the jewel in the crown, India' (Jeffries, 2015). The 'bankable' reproduction of the British Raj becomes a brand which remembers 'the past through rose-tinted glasses' (ibid) further perpetuating a myopic perspective of British multiculturalism. Paul Gilroy's account of the relationship between Indian restaurants and the Empire is understood as a way in which 'the Raj get(s) recycled as a fantasy' (Gilroy cited in Jeffries, 2015). This fantasy risks omitting or invisiblising the nature of struggle, racism, and horror of the past if it's 'merely an exercise in nostalgia' (ibid). It raises the question of employing culture as a marketable asset that is performing to appeal to the white gaze by playing the role of 'exoticised other' (Toor, 2002).

For places like Dishoom that facilitate such fantasy, the argument can be made that it's owned by Indians after all. Nor does it mean such Irani-style cafes or similar colonial nostalgia restaurants do not exist in India, especially given Toor's examination of Indo-Chic in a postcolonial, democratic India. Historian William Dalrymple and journalist Sathnam Sanghera, on the 'How to Academy' podcast (Dalrymple, Sanghera and Macinnes 2021)

discuss British Imperialism in India. They refer to such colonial nostalgia present in films and food post-Empire, noting that many Indians were also part of the East India Company. Many Indians held high ranking positions in the Empire. Material references to the Raj and participating in the Empire, while remarkably different, are an example of how inextricably linked the histories of the UK and South Asia are. This extends to how individuals respond to such events and stories, which includes food and culture alike, and how such artefacts are consumed and circulated through the different *scapes* as suggested by Appadurai.

The identitarian nature of Dishoom is different from places like Udaya Kerala and AC compares their difference through 'authenticity', where 'Dishoom represents everything that is colonial', while Udaya feels more 'authentic'. However, she thinks there is perhaps value to be found in such places like Dishoom because 'they make Indian food feel like they can be more than cheap curries in a takeaway container'. There is merit to elevating the 'class' of Indian food. It can also be argued that 'ethnic restaurateurs can direct eater's tastes' (Flowers and Swan, 2017) which would allow for more cosmopolitan, therefore positive, associations with Indian food and Indian people. While this appears to be contradictory to AC's initial declaration of Indian food as 'not posh', there is a desire to expand the seemingly essentialised nature of Indian cookery and therefore, India. The contradiction is better understood as AC working through her ambivalence of class, gentrification, and authenticity that is symbolised through not only the food but also Indian restaurants – from curry houses to popular, expensive chains. While Udaya Kerala and Dishoom are both South Asian restaurants, they are representative of the diaspora conflict of condensing a complex and diverse nation into any singular narrative – curry houses, Udaya Kerala, nor Dishoom are totally 'India' – while they belong to the national imaginary of India, they are also constantly changing through forces of class, gentrification, taste, and more. Muhammad, in her blog, suggests,

> With the food itself, these contemporary street food restaurants are cuttingly symbolic of gentrification trajectories and processes. The upscaling of street food more generally represents the wider hipster search for the elusive ~Authentic~. It's a colonial approach to things; you're out there searching for novelty, something raw and real, so you take it, recondition it and repurpose it as something authored into a familiar shape to you and your cultural specificity. Meanwhile, the original thing is barely recognisable, or only recognisable as something far removed from its original cultural or socio-political context. Regeneration/gentrification, the upscaling of street food – it's the same force at work, it's the same colonial n (and) capitalist extraction model that has typified whiteness for centuries (Muhammad, 2020).

This concern of repurposing is made apparent when AC discusses her love for the television show MasterChef. 'After years of hearing insults about smelly curries, it is now added to things, sold as 'fusion' and that bothers me because it feels like mild appropriation'. On MasterChef, the contestant will make 'Keralan curry,' shares AC, who is curious about what makes this curry Keralan. Besides the addition of coconut milk alone, how can the context of cuisine be appropriately managed or communicated by those outside the diaspora? EG's concern is with the overplayed opinion that Indian food is always heavy. EG says, 'Indian

food needs to not be greasy for it to be good – you can't have one mother sauce mass produced and add whatever meat you order mixed into it'. Both AC and EG's grievances are a complicated and everyday reflection of power and politics in food. For AC, appropriation is about the commercialisation and generalisation of cuisine without sufficient engagement. For EG, the 'misappropriation' as Krishnendu Ray refers to it, as the 'erasure through forced assimilation' (Ray, 2018). In Chapter 5, I'll expand on this discomfort/comfort tension of food, appropriation, authenticity, and power in my conversations with two South Asian chefs.

Emotional and Political Attachment to Identity through Food

The emotional attachment of belonging for both AC and EG overlap and diverge in interesting ways, influenced by their positionality and everyday experience. In shaping their narratives of identity and belonging, both AC and EG are making sense of their past experiences, their current interpretation of those events, and reflecting on what it means for their future self. As is consistent throughout the thesis, I am very careful and want to be specific to use the words as they have shared them. How they identify and make sense of their hyphenated British-Asian label shifts from everyday interactions to historical and gendered experience that confirms their belonging is political, to how food is understood as an articulation and consumption of identity. Both place an emotional and purposeful connection to the food they grew up with and the food they look for to perform a certain utility – to bring comfort, bridge connections, or be reminiscent of time with family.

The 'longing' to belong was more apparent for someone like AC who re-settled in the UK as a teenager, having to search for her British identity to attach to her Indian upbringing, therefore, eventually becoming British-Asian. EG's starting place, in contrast, is as a British-Asian, living amongst a diverse community of immigrants in Birmingham. While AC is often confident in her identity, she is forthcoming with the ways she's made to question it, claiming she still, at times, is confused as to where she is *from*.

> 'I don't think it's a bad thing. I like the fact that I'm not just British. It would be so lonely to be just one thing, but it is lonely to be all these things. I think about these things all the time, it is a part of me, especially since I've married a white man so far from my own culture and it's a constant reminder. Also, it's an odd thing that I teach English for a living.'

Both AC and EG talk about the disparate and fluid nature of their identity. AC doesn't feel as strictly Indian in terms of languages because she can't speak it as well or nor is able to fully express herself how she would like. Research elsewhere has shown the importance of English as an 'aspect of developing a sense of citizenship and belonging, it is also linked to a sense of identity and self-esteem' (Jackson, 2010). This was evident in how confident AC felt in her English-speaking identity through language and now being an English-language tutor. For EG, the mediation between her Punjabi and English identity was obvious in the everyday where she would go from visiting her mum's family in Suffolk to visiting a Gurdwara with her dad's side of the family. However, EG didn't think about her identity much when she was growing up.

'Where I grew up, a lot of people were mixed race of all ethnicities – Asian and Black people and I didn't have to question my identity as much. If you were white alone, you were the minority in my school. Only when I went to university did people start questioning me about it, so I was made to be hyper aware of it. It wasn't that I was confused about myself but confused with how to handle other people's questions. Yes, identity is messy and yes, I don't fit into other people's pre-conceived boxes but it's not about me as a person and I'm at a point that however you want to read me is your business not mine. If I am not really Asian to you, then maybe I am not by your standards and for others I may be.'

EG is wary of exerting any part of her identity – Asian or British – in fear of essentialising what it means to be either, even if defensive in nature. She doesn't feel the need to prove something that is inherently an ongoing construction of identity. Additionally, solidifying a singular idea of race feels largely oppressive and reinforces an 'us' and 'them' mentality. Hazel Carby ruminates heavily on this subject of 'where are you from', in her book *Imperial Intimacies*. Born to a Jamaican father and Welsh mother, her mixed-race identity was often in question where the answer was expected to satiate whoever was asking. She writes about her experience as a young girl: 'she stumbled for many years before she learnt the difficult lesson that she was not accountable to those who questioned her right to belong' (Carby, 2019). EG refers again to her school years, which is where young boys would challenge her Indian identity and say 'you don't dress like one or you listen to certain music' but those lifestyle factors never bothered EG. As she asserts, 'I look the way I look and there's nothing I can do about that'. EG has a strong sense of what her culture means to her and the connection she has to it is expressed through various means, predominantly in the act of eating and sharing food. It is also a practice that, for her, does not need much clarification. Nor a belonging that needs an approval from the person asking where she is from or critiquing how she isn't her identity 'enough'.

AC and EG diverge in the ways they discuss their identity, but both come back to food as central to their hyphenated identity. For AC, food was a way in which she expressed her Indianness – for example, by making a conscious decision to prepare sweets for Diwali, demonstrating which part of her identity needs to be expressed. This adaptation of the self recalls 'an 'older home' in India through the making, eating, and sharing of food in their 'new home' (Duruz 2010, cited in Longhurst, Johnston and Ho, 2009) – in this instance, food and the effort of making sweets served a purpose and this expression was under AC's control. A purpose of asserting identity, experiencing a nostalgia of visiting temples in East Ham, and feeling 'home'.

For EG, no place in London reminds her of the lived neighbourhoods of Birmingham. She maintains an attachment and nostalgia to Birmingham because she places a tremendous amount of value in what the city means and how it was shaped – the architecture, style of industrial housing having been the hotbed of the Industrial Revolution, and the feel to the working-class areas in which she grew up, while somewhat similar to London still aren't exactly reminiscent. EG lists places in London that pale in comparison to what Birmingham represents in its history. While AC feels a compulsion to make sense of new places as she

moved to the UK, EG does not feel the same burden. Birmingham is a geography that can still be part of her routine and is much more accessible than Gujarat or Kerala is for AC. Their upbringing a huge part of this divergence, given AC spent a lot of her childhood in India and had the desire for a smooth fit as she moved around India and the UK. A recollection of India, therefore, was important for AC, feeling as if there were roots that she lost once she gave up her Indian passport.

> 'I think the hardest part for me is giving up the Indian passport. That was the final nail in the coffin to agreeing to colonialism in a way. I try to tell myself it's like reverse colonialism, like I've taken someone's job, but it didn't work. I do feel a bit of a traitor in some ways, I don't know if we're ready to move on from feeling disgruntled - it's a very odd position to be in especially when you're talking about Indian history – who do you refer to as them and who do you refer to as us because both of them are technically now me. So, when you say they came over and stole all our stuff, who is 'they' and what do you mean by they or us now and calling yourself British as well. Or going to, for example, the Tower of London, looking at the Kohinoor (diamond), that shouldn't be here but that's cool. It's a very awkward, jarring moment. Like SOAS is right next to the British museum so I was constantly there and that was always a reminder of the odd feeling.'

AC's feelings are what Ahmed would describe as 'migrant orientation' which is the 'lived experience of facing at least two directions: towards a home that has been lost, and to a place that is not yet home' (Ahmed, cited in (Keenan, 2015). What AC communicates is while she now has the British passport, it does not mean that this place has become home, nor, that it is consistently home. Again, it is an ambivalence that keeps this orientation an ongoing process.

EG believes she has an outsider's perspective on her family's migration and how they experienced national belonging in the UK. Her dad did not have a British passport until EG was 15 years old and he faced a similar hesitation to give up his Indian passport as AC. India does not allow for dual citizenship and he was unprepared for a long time to part ways with this legal identity and property that maintained his attachment to India. EG was surrounded by others who did not have the right paperwork or the options she did. She is aware of the privilege that comes with being British by birth, and as a result of her intimate relationships and her experience of difference within her own family, expresses how she became politicised.

> 'There is a reason so many Asians are in Birmingham – and it gets a lot of slander. Birmingham has some of the most deprived areas in the country, concentrated in poor Pakistani and Muslim areas and even if I am not any of those things, I am defensive of how they categorise those areas.'

Her defensiveness of Birmingham is heavily influenced by the family in which she grew up – her mum was an academic and her dad a historian who took EG to demonstrations, rallies, and meetings. Her exposure to 'differences' and belonging to activist circles meant EG maintained a political understanding of her surroundings – from her hometown, its diverse diaspora and population, to her career and involvement in unions. She believes being mixed-

race has also made her more aware and able to notice certain things – how different people behave towards her and how different areas or spaces in London feel. In the previous chapter, I summarised Berlant's perspective of attachment and detachment. For EG, a hyperawareness of her migrant family's experience, along with her own experience of Birmingham and hyphenated identity, led to a detachment to essentialising her identity. While she identifies as a British-Asian, her articulation of self is less motivated by a desire to claim an identity, but she is more concerned with the process by which she expresses her belonging. Belonging, therefore, is seen as a practice, not a property nor a fixed state. For AC, this process of detachment is ongoing, given her background – however, in moments, her attachment to food becomes a practice in a counter-space of belonging. To refer back to a 'positive' politics of belonging, AC now has a British passport, a secure job, and a British partner. Yet, it is not about an 'inclusion' that guarantees or assures her belonging. Instead, her belonging is articulated in her everyday practice, negotiation, and ambivalences towards something as complex as her identity, to as seemingly banal as eating with her hands. Similarly, EG has had the political inclusion since birth, yet belonging is not a possession of a British national identity but a practice that she exercises in moments.

Space and Place in Belonging in East Ham

How important is location to AC and EG's articulation of belonging? Is it rooted or anchored in a specific neighbourhood or location? East Ham, as established, was personal to both participants, yet neither visited the neighbourhood frequently. Both also now live-in areas that don't boast a large South Asian population. Importantly, both are acutely aware of essentialising their identities and the spaces they occupy. East Ham, instead, is a product of their interactions and social relations in a given place. Massey argues,

> The global is in the local in the very process of the formation of the local. This, then, is an extension to the concept of place of that element of this argument about space which has it that not only is space the product of social relations but that it is those relations which constitute the social phenomena themselves. Thinking of places in this way implies that they are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations (Massey, 2007).

EG's defence of Birmingham is very much a defence of the relations that make up the place where she grew up. AC and EG have privilege in their mobility and feel a sense of attachment to place, without feeling a sense of 'reactionary… introverted obsessions with heritage' (Massey, 2007). East Ham, therefore, is a culmination of sociality and interactions that are specific to the food places of nostalgia. It is what Massey would call a 'meeting place' that is experienced and articulated through moments – moments in Udaya Kerala, in Taste of India. As I'll describe in different ways throughout the thesis, articulation of belonging is not a singular statement of 'I belong' or 'I do not belong' – these experiences are not a binary but a moment of feeling that is dependent on context. It is the familiar taste that evokes nostalgia and comfort, it is the recognition of class and economic capacity, it is the negotiation of feeling 'othered' for a moment when the smell lingers out of place, and it is a case of ambivalence.

Belonging to AC and EG

Through my interviews with AC and EG, I have argued cultural, social, and political belonging are experiences that are acting on one another – as racialised women of a South Asian diaspora, their articulation of belonging is a political identity.

The cultural, social, and political are an amalgamation of a history of diasporic politics, as well as a continuing hostile environment that is present in the UK. As such, I have questioned the role of 'belonging' in popular political discourse as a positive project of assimilation, highlighting some of the ways in which conditions persist that isolate and scrutinise the right to belonging for those who do not meet the countless and changing conditions – i.e. citizenship, language, race, and more. For example, championing the rise of racialised political figures like Suella Braverman, Priti Patel and Rishi Sunak assumes that representation dismantles existing power hierarchies. Instead, these three individuals, in particular, have demonstrated how their position enables them to uphold (and in some cases, worsen) inequalities through their policies or racially charged rhetoric. Assimilation and inclusion, additionally, maintains the state's power whereby granting access to 'British life' as 'members of a national family' re-establishes the boundaries of 'good' versus 'bad' immigrant who is waiting for the 'grace of the state' (Bhattacharyya *et al.*, 2021).

AC and EG exemplify the importance of difference in this research. Their positionalities represent the dynamic, contrasting, and sometimes, overlapping ways in which people express their identity or practice their belonging. For AC, who migrated to the UK at a young age, fitting in was a desire to be comfortable. In doing so, the 'longing for belonging', or to fit in the UK, becomes an expression of cruel optimism. As AC claims, even the British passport does not mean this place is always home. Rather, I suggest the practice of belonging allows for a greater sense of empowerment in moments and meeting places of restaurants, which are not without their own complexities, contradictions, and power imbalances. These spaces, nonetheless, are made of relations – of memories and nostalgia, of gender relations within domestic and public spaces, and of the community, such as East Ham. They perform a 'third space' or a counter-space of belonging.

Both AC and EG centre food as a crucial element to their identities, yet their motivations and feelings towards belonging are distinct. The reasons for which are innumerable – their place of birth, their experiences growing up, their families, and their own politicisation reflects their individual experiences. This chapter summarises some of these reasons – either as a desire to fit in that eventually became a motivating factor to stand 'out' for AC through food, or the recognition of one's sense of self as constantly developing, as EG moves through spaces – be that city, or neighbourhoods. Food, in Udaya Kerala and Taste of India, invited conversations beyond what we were eating but also of what food represents – to those within a diaspora where AC's lunchtime meals were different from her Indian peers that highlighted her South Indian identity in India. And to EG who detaches 'authenticity' as a label from both the food and the individual preparing or consuming a meal.

Their belonging is neither singularly defined, nor consistent. It is about emotional attachment that is and remains political. Food, itself, while seemingly banal and an everyday activity

does not erase politics from the plate. Instead, it makes space for politics – from the different *scapes* and forces of globalisation that challenges food and place, to place-less food, it is still imbued with meaning and nostalgia of homeland for AC, and of a heritage for EG. Throughout our lunches, there are moments of contradictions, of bold assertions, and of confusion – these are the moments that express their ambivalence towards belonging – to the multiple places they have lived, to their South Asian heritage and to London. In the next chapter, I look at another South Asian diasporic neighbourhood of Southall.

4 Gustatory Nostalgia, Southall Resistance – A sensory exploration of a high street; Samosas and chai with SBS

Throughout this project, I have been making a case for a vantage point through which to discuss the feelings of belonging for diasporic, migrant, and contemporary South Asian women, living in London through the lens of food. In the previous chapter, I focused on the politics of belonging in literature, the space of South Asian restaurants in London, and the participants who articulate their sense of belonging through food. In writing about the food of a diaspora, the connection between food and nostalgia can feel rather straightforward. Many, as AC and EG have described, relate to the potent capacity of food and memories of childhood or home as comforting and meaningful. A conscious effort is required to go further and note that the interaction between food and nostalgia is not consistently positive, as memories of home may not always arrive at sunnier moments of growing up. Ketu Katarak's essay on food and belonging, for example, recalls her childhood where food was not a pleasurable activity but an everyday experience of unequal gendered and domestic relations in the home (Katrak, 2020). We must, therefore, be cautious of romanticising the role of food in belonging and explore the tensions it raises.

Popular narratives have the tendency to homogenise opinions, depending on what narrative is in favour at the time. For example, discourse in migration and diaspora would present grim realities, covering news stories of difficult migrant journeys and an unflinching Conservative government ensuring a hostile environment remains before and long after migration. This is often supplanted with success stories of hybridity and conviviality, which are seen as triumphing bordered national identity. Migrants, refugees, asylum seekers are criminals and at the same time, examples of multicultural Britain. To further complicate the two, food and migration are also cited as a positive of multiculturalism where 'ethnic food' encourages locals to learn more about other cultures. While such opinions can be harmless, they can also reinforce a sense of contribution and value-dependent existence that furthers 'deservingness' narratives of the 'good' versus 'bad' migrant.

Food, migration, and belonging, therefore, are contradictory and conflicting – a claim to belonging, an identity or an attachment to place can at once be a project of self-expression, and at the same time, be limiting and narrow. As the previous chapters unpack popular narratives and rhetoric on the politics of belonging, this chapter continues to explore the alternatives and understand the everyday experiences that may subvert expectations, navigate tensions, and develop a sense of belonging or a counter-space of belonging. My initial framing of belonging dealt with the passage of time, assuming that the greater time spent creating networks and affiliations, the greater the sense of belonging. For example, for migrants, those who have lived in the UK longer are more likely to have an increased sense of familiarity with the place, an established routine, an understanding of their rights, and friends and families that enrich their everyday experience. However, what came out of my conversation with Southall Black Sisters, as will be discussed in this chapter, was a deeper understanding of their precarity, which exposed their pursuit of belonging as cruel optimism,

whereby something which they 'desire becomes an obstacle' as per by Lauren Berlant (Berlant, 2011). This chapter addresses this tension of belonging to London, belonging to the diaspora, and the limitations of belonging 'to'. Belonging is more complex than one singular relation – the relationship with the state, access to resources (economic, legal, social, or otherwise), the relationship with neighbours, and strangers, the intimacy of one's own relationships contribute to a feeling of belonging. Therefore, the context matters immensely on the everchanging feeling of belonging.

Chapter Outline

Arriving at Southall station, I am hyper aware of the sensory experience that is happening throughout my body. Borrowing from Alex Rhys-Taylor and Les Back, the 'art of listening', benefits from engaging the 'olfactory and gustatory' senses that give meaning to the 'banal aspects of everyday life'. In employing the senses, there is a greater understanding or the 'articulation of diasporic identities and the reproduction of ethnicised social spaces amidst the experience of dislocation' (Manalansan 2006, 41-57, cited in Rhys-Taylor, 2017). Similarly, food registers at the different sensories of our bodies – our memory is activated through the sights, aromas, and sounds of food. As Krishnendu Ray and David Howes suggest, 'the use of the multisensorial register of our bodies - a somaesthetic of smell, sound, touch, and taste, in addition to the usual distal record by the eyes and the mind' (Ray, 2020). This allows me to, as clearly as possible, articulate the experience I have in Southall. As our sensorial memories are often deeply private and intimate, I wanted to probe my own reactions and responses to the South Asian neighbourhood.

Belonging to the South Asian diaspora, I am using walking through Southall as part of my autoethnography during my visit. The first half of this chapter covers the history and space of Southall as I walk through the streets and pay attention to how my different senses are being engaged. As Rhys-Taylor notes in his study of Ridley Road Market, 'nose and taste buds have been integral to the articulation of diasporic identities and the reproduction of ethnicised social spaces amidst the experience of dislocation' (Rhys-Taylor, 2013). This experience can also produce negative feelings, for example, 'smelly curries' becomes a commonly used grievance that describes food and, by extension, South Asian people. Senses, therefore, are placed within a hierarchy in 'dominant cultures of the West that ascribes vision to the more evolved cultures and taste and smell to the 'primitive''(Sutton, 2001). As much of this thesis contends with the relationship of belonging and food for those of a South Asian diaspora, the symbolism of food takes shape in the sensorial, economic, social, and political. While there are many ways to approach this through the interaction of neighbourhood and city economically and culturally, I am curious to report on my own consumption of space and food sensorially in the busy Southall high street.

In exploring my sight, smell, sound, and taste, I am also piecing together a part of the history of this place and the community that makes it a vital part of British-Asian life. This is particularly informative in recognising how space and time 'can become potentially disrupted and juxtaposed, rendering experience a sensory' (Mavroudi, 2019). By observing both the

material and immaterial sense of experience, 'this approach may offer useful insights into the complex ways feelings of displacement, exile, rupture, disconnectedness and difference jar and jostle with belonging, connectedness and shared consciousness' (ibid). In discourse on space and place, de Certeau and Tovi Fenster suggest that belonging changes with time, where 'we make sense of space through walking practices and repeat those practices as a way of overcoming alienation' (Leach 2002 cited Fenster, 2005). As this is my first visit to Southall, the aim here is to report on my walk without intimate knowledge of the streets as a resident or any established routine. While I am part of the South Asian diaspora, I am not part of the Southall community as I do not live there. I want to be mindful of entering a space of which I am not an 'insider'. While I am walking up and down the high street and engaging with the community, I will not know what it is like to have grown up in Southall or live there. However, it is this exact position of subjectivity that I rely on.

The second part of this chapter consists of a focus group I conducted with the support of Southall Black Sisters. I interviewed a group of predominantly South Asian women, of varying backgrounds, many of whom have a precarious status within the UK, and all who have been victims of domestic abuse. These 18 women have lived in the UK from anywhere to less than a year to some women who have been living in London for over 20 years. In the Introductory chapter, I describe how I got in contact with SBS and how this interview was arranged. Given the sensitive nature of SBS' work, the focus group was conducted in roughly an hour and there are, as I'll explain in the section, some topics, especially food in the everyday, that could not be covered in the given time. Additionally, SBS, for security and privacy reasons, do not go into detail about the kind of services these women use. The group comes together roughly once a month to have an informal meeting, usually over tea, samosas, and other street food snacks. They meet at the same DIY-Church space, are familiar with one another, and are often involved in bringing other women (recent migrants or otherwise) to SBS. This meeting is a time for them to reunite, catch up and share experiences in a safe space, a place that feels protected from their public, 'outside' London lives.

The focus group sits in contrast with the other interviews in the thesis. As Yuval-Davis has posited, belonging is politicised when threatened. In this section, I expand on the threats faced by the participants that significantly limit a claim to belonging as compared to the other participants. It is exactly when such political belonging dictates exclusion that emotional attachments reveal their importance. For example, the political community and solidarity found amongst the participants at the SBS meetings. Once again, I rely on space/place, food as place-making, class and gender as running themes that position the major argument and claim of belonging through food.

Part 1

Southall Sensories

There is a distinct desire to engage my sense of sight, smell, sound, feel, and taste that is both conscious and subconscious. I prepare for the journey by listening to Hindi and Punjabi

music - something I have generally avoided in public. I often listen to a Bollywood song at a low volume because I feel embarrassed and have the fear that I will be perceived as 'too Indian', and my identity will be reduced to my ethnicity alone – a fear of fitting a 'stereotype' that keeps me from indulging in a pleasure of language that feels private to me and one that I do not often express myself in. While there is a conscious effort to use music as a portal of language and culture, there is a subconscious attempt of recall a past. This is because most of the Hindi or Punjabi music I know is only familiar to me in a particular time and space of visits to my parents, watching Bollywood films or developing a taste for the music my parents listened to while we were all in a car together. For this excursion to London Zone 4, I am setting the scene of travelling to the past through music and lyrics that have, to some extent, taught me the language – travelling outside my regular London routine (and space) feels like a symbolic journey to a past and a new location at the same time. Southall is one of the few stations with a bilingual sign – Whitechapel added a Bengali sign in 2022. On the platform, Southall is written in both English and Punjabi and while I cannot read Punjabi Gurmukhi script, I am instantly reminded of attempting to learn during a short stint in a school in Chandigarh. The Southall sign reveals a cultural, social, historical, political past that is very much part of the present – the use of Punjabi script anchors the diasporic story of this neighbourhood and of the meaning of home. As Avtar Brah writes,

> Where is home? On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense, it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of locality, its sounds and smells (Brah, 1996).
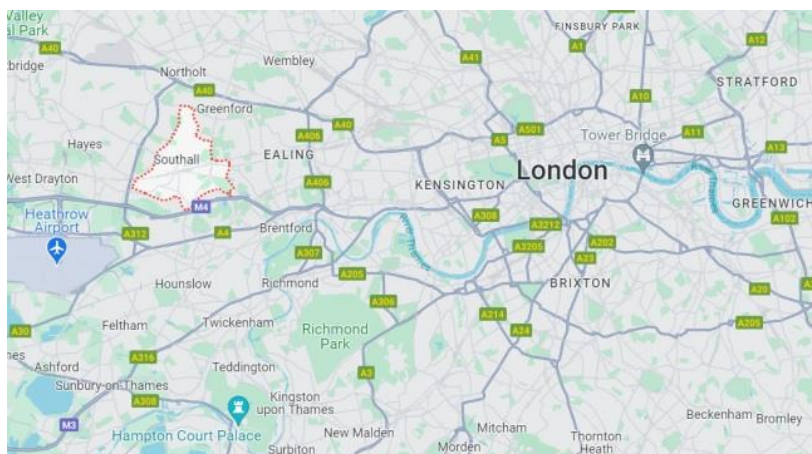
The red outline shows Southall's location in London. Southall sits in Zone 4 via public transportation.

Image: Google Map, Southall Available at: https://maps.app.goo.gl/S5 XQpyngHkuNfxkv7

In chapter 2, which covers discourse on diaspora, 'here' and 'there' to describe home and locality must be elastic, accounting for multiple places. The difference of place is understood, as Brah suggests, through the sounds and smells where 'the experience of moving often to a new home is most felt through the surprises in sensation: different smells, different sounds at night, more or less dust' (Ahmed, 1999). Recognising the similarities and differences in such sensations becomes a way to negotiate with the feelings of 'here' and 'there'.

Southall Resistance - History, Present, and the in-between

My eyes seem to replace regular vision with a 'Punjabi' filter. I once again cannot decipher whether this was a conscious decision to feed my nostalgia or subconscious response to what I was seeing. Writer Amardeep Singh Dhillon recalls his memories of growing in Southall as 'fragmented, characterised by the trappings of the most tired representations of South Asian communities in popular culture - dizzying hues of sari fabric, the scent of *samosa* and *pani puri,* the 'bustle' of the busy streets…' (Dhillon, Nunn, et al. 2022). Arjun Appadurai considers the role of the contemporary nation-state and the process of 'museumizing' heritage politics (Appadurai, 1990). The stand-out commodities of the high street, as Dhillon suggests, take form in the *samosa*, *pani puri*, and sari, lehenga, and suit fabrics. Appadurai would attribute this to a way of 'exercising taxonomical control over difference; by creating various kinds of international spectacle to domesticate difference; and by seducing small groups with the fantasy of self-display on some sort of global or cosmopolitan stage' (Appadurai, 1990). What became routine or simplified of the everyday South Asian-hybrid experience for Dhillon, at first, felt new and exciting for me. The heritage on display, however, does go beyond the aesthetics of a material or tangible good that represents a part of the South Asian imagination or a sign of cosmopolitan London. Belonging to the South Asian diaspora, I feel equipped with the vague knowledge of Southall as a 'hub' of South Asians living in London – told to me through stories of my own extended family's migration to the city, and specifically to Southall. Southall, known as 'Little India' or 'Little Punjab', therefore has a complicated history of empire, migration, and 'home'.

I was looking for signs of that history to see if the streets deposit memories of homing, riots, protests, activism – the events that have made Southall – in the same way the samosa or a sari can be a symbol of South Asian commodities. Homing can be understood as 'a set of home-related routines and practices, and as an underlying existential struggle toward a good-enough state of being home' (Boccagni, 2022). The idea of homing is particularly salient in diasporic communities where home as a lived experience is negotiating the tension between the 'past ascriptions and future-oriented potentialities, and as a visible manifestation of group, societal and existential inequalities' (ibid). Homing becomes a useful way of understanding Southall as a place which bolsters a capacity to 'reproduce emotional and sensorial connections with a home(land) grounded in collective memories of the past' (ibid).

Camp Coffee in 2023

Initial migration and post-colonisation saw many South Asians settling in the UK, in addition to the many people brought over from the colonies to help revitalise Britain post-war. Sikhs, in particular, were seen as 'martial, brave, and willing to sacrifice'. Aakriti Kohli has argued the British 'deliberately employed this discourse of bravery so that they could patronise the Sikh soldiers and prevent an uprising from them, by privileging their Khalsa identity and posting them in opposition to Hindus and Muslims' (Kohli, 2016). In doing so, the British created the 'ideal' soldier and reinforced 'their idea of militarised masculinity' and considered the Jat Sikhs as 'slow-witted, easy to control, temperamental but loyal' (ibid). This narrative of the loyal Sikh was even depicted in a Scottish-produced 'Camp Coffee'. A concentrated essence of coffee, chicory, and sugar, popular amongst the British Indian Army. The label originally depicted a Sikh man carrying a tray of coffee next to a seated Scottish soldier. It was later revised, removing the tray from the servant's hand but now, as seen in Image 1, 'the label depicts the bearer and the Gordon Highlander officer sitting as equals - no longer promoting the master-servant Days of the Raj message'.[21] Putting aside, for now, the colonial nostalgia of a coffee syrup and the Raj, there is a contradiction between the 'loyal' Sikh soldier that would accompany the British in India to the eventual maligned Sikh migrant settling in the UK, in Southall – their loyalty and 'deservingness' needs to be proven once again to accommodate for their migration to the UK.

Southall would see another wave of migration in the 1960s and 70s when Asians from East Africa moved to the UK after being expelled by Idi Amin. Several settled in Southall given its proximity to Heathrow airport and the factories in the area that offered employment for the incoming workforce. However, there is also 'a bleak Southall joke that wonders whether Indians chose to make their home around Heathrow airport in case they immediately had to leave again' (Nunn et al., 2022). Gilroy would suggest this possibility or desire of 'return' isn't uncommon amongst some who long for reconciliation to homeland, although Mishra would argue 'diasporas do not return to their homeland' (Mishra, 1996). 'Return', as discussed in the chapter, On Diaspora, isn't necessarily about physical return but a desire to 'fit in by being assigned a place in a forgotten past' (Ahmed, 1999). This desire is fuelled, in part, by an idealisation of the past, of how we choose to remember. Southall becomes a paradoxical space – it is not fully 'home' but, over time, has created a new community who have 'a common bond with those others who have 'shared' the experience of living

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[21] Evening Standard (2012) *Camp Coffee forced to change label by the PC brigade*, *Evening Standard*. Available at: https://www.standard.co.uk/hp/front/camp-coffee-forced-to-change-label-by-the-pc-brigade-7215292.html (Accessed: 24 October 2023).

overseas', connected by a heritage, 'sharing the lack of a home rather than sharing a home' (Ahmed, 1999).

As the neighbourhood continued to witness an increase of South Asian inhabitants, there was a greater concentration of tangible space that served as a recollection of an ancestral homeland – from shops selling products of home to community spaces or religious sites – Southall was a place of collective homemaking. It also became a space of subsequent acts of racism and violence towards the community, a marker of the Hostile Environment that would eventually be a Home Office initiative.[22] In 1976, Gurdip Singh Chaggar, an 18-year old boy was stabbed to death on the high street by white youths, one of several racist murders at the time, which eventually led to the creation of the Southall Youth Movement (SYM). SYM was one amongst several Asian Youth Movements, formed to challenge racism felt around the country including in Sheffield, Bradford, and Birmingham. Fighting the 'three interconnected isms' of fascism, racism, and imperialism',[23] The Asian Youth Movement continued the history of struggle that was too familiar, stemming from a legacy of colonisation and the fight for independence. In 1979, SYM organised an anti-racism demonstration against the far-right National Front (NF), who planned to hold an election rally in Southall, with an intention to turn Southall into a 'peaceful English hamlet'.[24] The demonstration, which had supporters from beyond Southall itself, resulted in the death of anti-racist activist Blair Peach at Southall Town Hall, at the hand of police officers defending NF. [25]

The violence, chants, comments, and the hate speech that took place during these two events (and many others) have a lasting impact on the history of Southall. It has an impact on me as I walk through Southall, fully aware that the nostalgia of homing and 'South Asian aesthetic' it provides for me is only made possible because of the resilience and struggles of those activists, neighbours, residents, and community that fought against National Front members, law enforcement, government, hateful policies, and direct/indirect everyday racism. It is a reminder that places like Southall have carved out an identity and a contested belonging with a price – the loss of friends, families, and neighbours. With that in mind, it is hard to solely romanticise Southall and the diasporic community. I am forced to have an almost forensic approach to walking and observing beyond my own nostalgia. I reflect on this tension again between the politics of belonging and belonging, which echoes a question at the heart of this research – what does belonging look like when shaped by a history of hostility that doesn't

[22] Daboo, J & Sinthuphan, J. (2018) 'To Claim a Place: South Asian Women's Activism and Performance in Southall, UK', in *Mapping migration: Culture and identity in the Indian diasporas of Southeast Asia and the UK*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 77–97.

[23] Ali, T. (2020) *'come what may, we're here to stay': Remembering the Asian Youth Movements*, *Tribune*. Available at: https://tribunemag.co.uk/2020/12/come-what-may-were-here-to-stay-remembering-the-asian-youth-movements (Accessed: 24 October 2023).

[24] Foley, C. (2009) *Police violence and death: An old story*, *The Guardian*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/apr/26/police-blair-peach (Accessed: 24 October 2023).

[25] Daboo, J & Sinthuphan, J. (2018) 'To Claim a Place: South Asian Women's Activism and Performance in Southall, UK', in *Mapping migration: Culture and identity in the Indian diasporas of Southeast Asia and the UK*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 77–97.

remain in the past and what does it mean for the future? As I will demonstrate, it is exactly when belonging is threatened and politically challenged that emotional attachments become more important, forcing a re-imagination of the word itself. Such attachments are also informed by the practice of 'homing' that is 'shaped by our ongoing social relations' (Boccagni, 2022) and as these relationships adapt, so does our belonging.

Beyond Space of Southall

There are many events that have made Southall – the murder of Chaggar and Peach are two examples of such moments that shape the neighbourhood. Southall also witnessed a number of campaigns, including one in 1965 where white parents were fervently against Asian children in schools, out of fear that they would 'hold back' white children (Brah, 1999). In 2013, as directed by the Home Office, vans were sent to neighbourhoods with majority immigrant populations, including Southall, with a message that read 'go home or face arrest' (Jones *et al.*, 2017). However, it is not just events within the 'borders' of Southall but a collective experience of South Asians across the UK (and beyond). Racist encounters in different cities and boroughs in the country have an impact on the South Asian community and diaspora at large as it demonstrates not only how unwelcomed the diaspora was and is, but serve as a reminder that do not belong in the country. The space, as Doreen Masey argues, is a product of interrelations – it goes beyond the physical or geographical location because of the shared experience of belonging as politicised and under threat of diasporic South Asians elsewhere. Hateful policies, speeches like the infamous Enoch Powell 'Rivers of Blood', become part of the South Asian struggle, a continued recognition of being othered historically. As Chandra Mohanty points out in *Feminism without Borders*, location, as identity, is not fixed nor singular and while borders embody a sense of containment, the experiences of oppression and struggle are shared (Mohanty, 2003). The 'Go Home' vans circled Hounslow, Brent, and other boroughs. A park in Brick Lane was the site of the racially motivated murder of Aftab Ali in 1978, a Bengali textile worker. The aftermath of which led to protests by several ethnic minorities living in the area. These are just a few snapshots of violence, protest, struggle, resistance, and solidarity that become markers of such interconnected places.

While locations are an integral part where such resistance begins, the struggles elsewhere become part of the experience, especially in predominantly South Asian neighbourhoods around the UK, that led to the creation of anti-racist communities like the Asian Youth Movements. When places are attacked – homes, shops, religious sites – in Southall, Brick Lane, Hounslow, or other such neighbourhoods means there is a need for political self-defence elsewhere in Manchester and Bradford. The environment of racism, the lack of institutional support, and the legacy of colonialism did not see borders within cities but rather an occupation of spaces by those who do not seemingly belong. Southall and places like it become a site of memory, a 'trigger' as Brah writes (Brah, 1999). A trigger and shorthand to mean a place of migration, of South Asians, of 'others', a place that is contested and living.

I am not in India, yet I am certainly experiencing a part of Indian history. I am a diasporic South Asian - I have rarely lived in the country of my birth. However, being in the UK

complicates this diasporic identity because my migration and the migration of many living in Southall is a direct impact of colonisation. The feeling of home and identity, therefore, is further complicated by building a home in the heart of the empire, in London – does this destination provide respite? While the once-removed experience of India is of comfort to me, Southall was the most Indian outside of India I felt as a result of the colonial ties that are indivisible to the Indian experience. Southall was more than just a hub of South Asians but a place of partition, especially of Punjab – as such, the memories were layered, complex, and not one feeling could encapsulate what it means to walk in this neighbourhood. As soon as I exit the station, there is a Gurdwara to my right, which is plastered with signs of support for the Punjabi Farmers Protest happening at that time in India. These protests in 2021 were against farm acts passed by the Indian government, which would have made farmers more vulnerable to larger corporations in the country. The laws were eventually repealed; however, the protest came at a cost to many farmers who died before their demands were met. The protest would eventually become one of the largest and longest agrarian protests in the world. This confirms the once-removed feeling, as the place of Southall wasn't detached spatially or temporally from the issues and concerns happening in India. If anything, it reasserts how 'Punjab's land has gone through intense upheaval - annexed by the British Empire to grow cash crops for empire, and then partitioned into the quivering borders of the Indian and Pakistani nation-state'.[26] Additionally, this protest is reminiscent of a 1907 protest against the British government who employed similarly oppressive laws as the current BJP party that aimed to strip away control from the Punjabi farmers.

The support of the farmer's protest sign was one example of many that made linked the political struggles faced by the community and Southall – as mentioned, the struggles of the diaspora are not contained within a place but there is a visible connection between Southall and the ancestral homeland. Southall as a place embodies acts of resistance, and it remains a site of struggle – what happened in its history doesn't remain in the past. In fact, Southall Resist 40 (SR40), a group of local residents, organisations, activists were formed to remember the policing of the Southall community. SR40 marked the murder of Gurdip Singh Chaggar and Blair Peach by placing plaques in their memory on Southall Town Hall. It serves as a symbolic and physical embodiment of a claim to place off the high street.

The Sensory High Street - Sights, Smells, and Taste of Memory

Soon after the Gurdwara, I see an all too familiar restaurant, Saravana Bhavan, a South Indian food chain that has branches all over the world, including a few in my hometowns in Malaysia and Singapore. However, the restaurant itself wasn't of as much significance but rather what it was known for – dosas. While I have memories of eating dosa in India, it was a more meaningful routine in Southeast Asia. As such, it is not that the meal itself is

[26] Sandhu , A. (2022) *Punjab: Food, music and resistance*, *Punjab: Food, Music and Resistance*. Available at: https://vittles.substack.com/p/punjab-food-music-and-resistance?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email (Accessed: 01 August 2023).

particularly extraordinary (although, it is incredibly delicious) but it is the ritual of our family lunches that feeds my nostalgia and longing for the past. *Dosa* for lunch was a popular tradition for my family in Singapore and Malaysia – it was Indian food my mum did not make in the home, it was affordable, and a reliable meal. Komala Vilas, a restaurant in Singapore, was our most frequented dosa place. One of their outlets had a self-serve crockpot of sambar, which satisfied the amount of sambar I require for my dosa. South Indian friends have been alarmed by the amount of sambar I consume with dosa and tell me this isn't how it's done in the South. The very spelling of the food invited its own characteristics of 'authenticity' - *dosa* for North Indians, *thosai* for South Indians, and *tose* for Malaysians. Such divisions of North and South have made their way into recent political elections in the Southern Indian state of Karnataka, posing the question, 'can *chole bhature* be successful as a snack in Interior Karnataka? Can it be more successful than *masala dosa*?'[27] This food division serves as an explanation for BJP's lack of success in South India as the party (and Modi) appears to represent just the North. This seemingly singular and regional South Indian cuisine becomes more than a popular food or meal but a symbol that shapeshifts. It is a South Asian meal in Malaysia and Singapore, a regional speciality in India that is a signifier of the North/South divide, and a combination of all these in London. In other words, 'just as people's identities shift levels in changing contexts such as migration, local products can take on shifting identifications as well' (Sutton, 2001). It is a complex reminder of the multiplicity of home but is not without its own divisions and borders of the food, what it represents, and how to consume it.

My senses are heightened to make note of further points of familiarity as I walk – I do a scan for things that stand out and recognise vegetables like *ghiya* or bottle gourd, which are not readily available in my immediate London surroundings. Being in Southall is like accessing memories that do not belong to the space of Southall itself but are articulated in this environment, where I attempt to make sense of the place I am in. Acknowledging these products of a home, it takes a minute for my sense of smell to activate, and I can sense the aromas of naans and kulchas and spot a juice shop selling paan. Paan has a distinct smell I can only best describe as fresh, vegetal, with a faint aroma of the clove that often closes the paan leaf containing ingredients I cannot always identify. The smell is far more intoxicating right in the moment you are about to consume it, hopefully in one big bite and it lingers on your breath like a digestif. There would often be *paan walas* (paan sellers) outside restaurants, waiting for diners who fancied a post-meal digestive snack. There are many varieties of paan, although I have only tasted the sweet kind – the tobacco paan has an intensity I don't believe I'll ever be ready for. It is perhaps the tobacco paan that E. M. Forster wrote about, describing 'his pleasure and revulsion at consuming paan' which has a 'taste as akin to feeling one's tongue stabbed by a hot and angry orange in alliance with pepper' (310, Forster cited in Mannur, 2022).

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[27] Nag, K. (2023) *Karnataka polls: Chole Bhature can't beat South India's Masala Dosa*, *The Siasat Daily*. Available at: https://www.siasat.com/karnataka-polls-chole-bhature-cant-beat-south-indias-masala-dosa-2589227/ (Accessed: 01 August 2023).

Anita Mannur's book, *'Intimate Eating: Racialized Spaces and Radial Futures',* explored an art installation by artist Sita Kuratomi Bhaumik. The installation, titled 'Curry Cartography', 'Sweet, South, Salty, Bitter, Curry' placed 'site-specific map of the world… with a combination of Behr paint and curry powder, a table filled with curry-scented jars, a site-specific curry-scented wallpaper, and a bottle of curry-scented eau de toilette' (Mannur, 2022). The map wasn't specific to India and its trade routes but locations around the world, corresponding with dishes and food that could be broadly considered 'curry', challenging the 'issue of whether the odour of curry would have a disruptive effect on the other installations, because the smell refused to stay in place and migrated throughout the space of the museum' (ibid). Mannur takes this exhibit as a commentary on the relationship between space, order, and migrant bodies and their food. Using curry as a metaphor, the intention is to consider how an 'encounter with difference interrupts the experience of sociality, what might be some of the ways in which food, typically imagined as a source of comfort, can be reconfigured in order to productively mine the value of the space of discomfort, conflict, and the thorny, as Bhaumik so artfully renders explicit in her olfactory installation?' (ibid). To consider the food, consumption and eating practices within Southall is to pay attention to the smell and appearance of the public spaces where such the diaspora lives. Mannur describes this as intimate eating public, a 'vexed, contested space that is hybrid and evolving' where 'every act of eating with others, or alone, is a form of intimacy. And yet each gesture of eating is laced with multiple meanings that acquire differential public meanings' (ibid). In this walk, I consider how Southall and its street food, restaurants, and storefronts organise the space and form sociality in the neighbourhood.

I continue to recognise the 'somatic work' my body is doing, where I 'make sense of the smells, flavours, sounds and textures of my (one's) own cultural milieu' (Rhys-Taylor, 2013). These senses help form memories of the past in the present. The Southall High Street doesn't reproduce a single street-based memory of Punjab, but it does remind me of a combination of places and routines. On visits to India, the chaat place in Southall reminds me of the preferred chaat place in Chandigarh, where my family and I would make a dedicated journey to eat at a specific stall in Sector 34. Naeem Juice Corner fills the void of Prince Paan in New Delhi that my parents frequented since moving to Delhi in the late 80s – these aren't even my memories but stories of my parents' idealisation of their own 'past' life told to me as a legend of life in India. Walking down this street no longer felt like a mundane afternoon activity but was affecting my senses in a way that transformed the space around me into a meaningful practice of recollection – idealised or otherwise, it would often be a mix. To recognise my ambivalence, I had to remind myself of what circulates around the consumption of paan or chaat – the waiting in the heat, other plans that were being delayed, the borrowed cars as my parents no longer had their own – a recognition that their 'home' wasn't how they left it. These spaces of food – from the supermarket to the little and big stalls and restaurants – were placed within a context of being in multiple homes within India itself. Most importantly, these were experiences I shared with my parents, who are my anchors of the 'homeland'. These aren't banal experiences but reminiscent of a journey to a place of my parent's life that I wasn't part of. It is a cultural heritage I have only visited but a space that I could have inhabited and grown up in had my parents not migrated – the possibility of a different life.

Therefore, I was experiencing a layered sense of nostalgia – growing up outside India, the homeland was a destination, not a place that shaped my everyday life. It wasn't the food itself but, in the context, as it exists in Southall, along with all the surrounding South Asian commodities, that was emotionally and physically transportive.

The smell isn't of the many food places alone but the fabric stores that carry a smell of warmth. Fabric shops I have encountered in India have a routine of ironing the many prints and materials used to make anything from salwar kameez, sari's, to, as I have done, repairing a damaged old jacket. I walk past shops that have jewellery on display on the street itself, selling colourful, attractive, shiny plastic bangles. I had a strong recollection of bangles being sold at my grandad's local sector shop in Panchkula, especially during Diwali and other festivals. The joy of seeing these bangles and *mehndi* (henna) were particularly meaningful as a young girl visiting an ancestral home. They, along with street food, were tangible and material things that belonged to India specifically. The nostalgia I felt here wasn't due to a repeated walk-through Southall as de Certeau and Fenster would suggest, but rather it was reminiscent of repeated walks elsewhere in Punjab. It was only after the fact that I realised I had given into the urge of recalling an idealised and imaginary past where I, as Salman Rushdie writes in Imaginary Homelands, 'create fictions', dealing with the broken mirrors of my migration. It is exactly nostalgia without memory, 'a synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios' (Grainge, 2000), where I cannot remember actually purchasing bangles or having *mehndi* done, but I can easily place myself in the position where I, theoretically, could have accessed those markers of Indianness. Such experiences of Southall, therefore, evoked memories that informed parts of my South Asian identity.

The fragrance of the food and shops, the material objects of South Asia stood in contrast to my London routine. The smells, sights weren't diminished but visible and a considerable sight on the streets. The 'intimate eating public', for me, is exactly that – it is intimate because the food feels personal, and it is public in a way that is protected in the space of Southall. While I'll address street food in detail in the following section, it is important to highlight the interaction of space and food – a kulcha, for example, isn't repackaged as something novel to be sold outside of the South Asian community. This does not mean outsiders cannot access this in Southall, but rather, the culinary experience, including its scent, spice, taste is not 'othered' nor altered. Visiting Southall felt very similar to our visits to India when I was younger – it is a destination and not an everyday experience, however, it was a space for me to dwell. Mannur examines food bloggers and the internet acting as a space of desire and dwelling, she notes the significance of inhabiting 'a physically and geographically bound space while dwelling someplace else' where to dwell is to 'feel part of a community' (Mannur, 2022). Mannur combines 'dwelling' with orientation, borrowing from Sara Ahmed, stating, 'to be oriented means to know where one's body fits into surroundings. To be oriented means to know where and how one dwells' (Ahmed cited in (Mannur, 2022). For me, dwelling has been most comfortable in relation to food, especially because India itself was distant, and therefore so was the community in South Asia that I did not immediately 'fit into'. The food, however, was known, a knowledge I could possess.

Culinary Citizenship

In Ketu Katarak's essay on 'Food and Belonging: At 'Home' and in 'Alien' Kitchens,' Katarak writes about the nostalgia of Indian food taking on new meaning only after she migrated to the U.S. (Katrak, 2020). Mannur, along with Katarak, cautions the fond nostalgic properties and asserts the 'metacritique of what it means to route memory and nostalgic longing for a homeland through one's relationship to seemingly intractable culinary practices which unflinchingly yoke national identity with culinary taste and practices', which Mannur calls 'culinary citizenship' (Mannur, 2022). Mannur explains culinary citizenship as the right to claim a certain identity and authority via one's relationship to food. Similar to how we've understood diaspora, there is an exclusiveness to this form of citizenship, as any citizenship would signify, which 'can lead to the creation of distorted fictions, which imagine cuisines as discrete, immutable, and coherent expressions of unfaltering national essences' (ibid). Mannur considers the 'web of affiliations' that act on the migrant's memory to form a diasporic imaginary of South Asia. Contemporary Southall, again, feels symbolically bordered, reproducing a conflict between the experience of homing through the sights, smells, and sounds and the limitations of national identity with food at the centre.

Southall high street had several supermarkets, all offering similar produce and products ranging from South Asian instant noodles, snacks, cooking utensils, to homecare and beauty products. All supermarkets seemed to be equally occupied with shoppers, and the rest of the crowd on the road was limited to a large queue in front of an Amritsari Kulcha and Chana shop. The £4 Kulcha, with the specificity of Amritsar, affords it a greater 'authenticity' as it enhances the value and quality of the recipe from any regular Kulcha. Amritsar is a hugely influential place in Punjabi culture as a site of trade and importantly, the Golden Temple. 'A popular saying about Amritsar is that dinner is never cooked at home (within the walled city) as people prefer to dine out or rely on the takeaway food and snacks from *dhabas* (highway eating places originally supposed to cater mainly to truck drivers) and holes-in-the-wall,' (Kaur, 2004), which is precisely what this storefront achieves – offering a street food item (as Kulcha is made in tandoor oven) in a hole-in-the-wall. Amritsari Kulchas differ from regular Kulchas as they are filled with a myriad of stuffing possibilities from potato, paneer, to cauliflower and are tangy and crispy. In fact, 'there is an entire street in the heart of the walled city, called *Kulche wali gali* (street of Kulcha vendors)' that asserts a Kulcha made here 'is unlike the ones made anywhere else… especially the ones dipped in chana' (ibid). Kulcha's association to Amritsar is similar to the conversation on 'terroir' or a 'taste of place', where an example of French Wine becomes a calculated marketing tool to be considered the best. As such, as 'terroir evolved to become something precious', Food historian Rachel Laudan has shown 'codified connection between place and production makes no sense as history, but rather is a space to examine the vestiges of colonial power structures that endure' (138, Laudan 2004 cited in Crossland-Marr and Krause, 2023). The history of the Kulcha travels back to the Mughal Empire and a particular Emperor's fondness of the bread that popularised Kulcha throughout Punjab, including what is now Lahore, pre-partition. Its allure is akin to *sarson da saag* and *makki di roti*, which becomes a 'symbolic statement of Punjabi regional identity today that nostalgically celebrates the rural roots of its

sons of the soil rather than an accurate reflection of the levels of maize consumption in Punjabi history' (Mannur, 2009). Similarly, the Kulcha itself is of an ethereal significance to Amritsari, and by extension, Punjabi identity. As Mannur argues, this correlation of such food and a South Asian identity is more to do with nostalgia as the dishes themselves are not always autochthonously 'Indian' but acts as a marketing tool of authenticity, nonetheless. A *sarson da saag and makki di roti*, to me, however, reminds me of my childhood naivety where 'makki', which sounds like 'makhi' meaning mosquito, was in the roti. I had submitted to the idea that mosquitos in a roti was just a traditional food, like eating insects in a taco.

Food places in Southall made a big part of this high street and the only businesses truly populated. As I continue my walk, I mentally map places I need to explore further – whether it is a market selling a tawa or outdoor vendors selling kebabs – the interactions with such commodities are unlike the shopping and eating cultural practices elsewhere. I study menus plastered on the windows of restaurants, comparing prices in my head, making judgments of what I think I'd like to eat more and, perhaps most importantly, what I can't get in other parts of London so I can fulfil my comfortable connection to India. I am convinced, without trying any restaurant, that I can't make a bad decision, but I do want to make the best decision to make the most of this hour-long journey to Southall, driven by the desire to eat something I cannot get elsewhere. My belonging to the diaspora is what Mannur and Sunaina Maria call 'critical nostalgia', 'a more reflexive form of nostalgia attuned to the politics of consumption. To consume culture in all its varied forms, or to be nostalgic for cultural artifacts' (Mannur, 2009). It is also a desire for a particular kind of pleasure that is infrequent and for '*mazza*' – which I will expand on in the following sections. Eventually, I am met with the greatest possible stand that feels like it must exist solely for my pleasure – Jalebi Junction.

There is something incredibly special and exceedingly nostalgic about a large vat of oil with a light orange hue infused by the saffron in the jalebi. The enigmatic manner in which jalebi is spiralled into the oil with confidence and precision is mesmerising – even my descriptions cannot avoid the seduction of this dessert. I have only witnessed this a number of times and I, momentarily, felt ill equipped to discuss the purchase of jalebi without my parents, as my culinary kinship would be lost without their guidance. The encounter with such street food was reserved for a specific place and time, and it usually was in India and with my family. Such food also defined Indian street food for me personally because it was a unique skill I associate within the borders of the country, meant for large quantities, available for consumption outside any designated mealtime, and tied to vendors my parents approved of. Their approval was important for street food generally, in part because hot and fresh tastes better, but also due to the fear that any food sitting outside in the elements for too long would challenge hygiene and quality – a feeling held onto from the 60s and 7 0s of their childhood where street food was often considered to be the harbinger of illness. Their knowledge was based on repeated consumption, tracing back years from when they first lived in Chandigarh or Delhi. This preference exhibited an authority about the cities they no longer live in but felt an anxiety to remain attached to their previously held notions of acceptable vendors.

The men working at the Jalebi Junction were speaking in Punjabi with comforting yet intimidating familiarity, and while it was my first time there, I wanted to prove my Indian-ness and, by extension, prove I belonged in the space. As such, I wanted to make sure I got the etiquette right – I order in Punjabi, eager to convince them of my 'degree of linguistic fluency' (Wessendorf 2010 cited in Rhys-Taylor, 2013). I wanted to project that this space fits me, and I fit it and in order to do so, I wanted to express my membership through my knowledge of food – to prove my culinary citizenship. A seasoned jalebi eater would know how sticky jalebi can be and how the crispy texture is only possible when the jalebi is perfectly thin – another mark of ownership I could claim on the jalebi was knowing how best to consume it as if there is one 'correct' way. The sugary taste was better than I remembered and the steam, rising from the bag, perfumed the air around me and I felt like a tourist in India again.

Jalebi

In the podcast, Empire, historian William Dalrymple and journalist Anita Anand explore stories and events of the British empire in India. In an episode on Partition, they speak with Kavita Puri, author of Partition Voices: Untold British Stories on stories and testimonies of partition. In their conversation, they detail the continuing legacy of the partition, the violence, and discuss the difficulty, and often reluctance, to talk about the harrowing events of the migration. Puri found, in her writing of the book, that those who migrated to Britain couldn't look behind on their experience while trying to make a future in a generally unwelcoming country – however, this was changing with a new generation where people were asking their parents and grandparents about partition. (Dalrymple, Anand and Puri, 2022).

In the episode, all speakers comment on the things that people between this newly constructed border have in common – language, food, and culture. Dalrymple shares a story of a group of Hindus who got stuck in a militant part in the Northwest of Punjab where the army couldn't get to them as there was only one entrance/exit to the village. They were eventually saved by sweet sellers who threatened the use of their boiling oil, normally used for making jalebis, and managed to keep the army away for two days. I attempted to find out more about this particular story but, as the podcast emphasises, several such events are rarely spoken of and, therefore, recorded. Hearing this, I struggled to think of jalebi as simply a sugar bomb of nostalgia or as a food that never existed before my introduction to it. I

considered the way I attached my memory to this food and what it might mean for others who have their own stories attached to a jalebi – of pleasure, tension, ambivalence, or distaste.

Confronting Nostalgia

With that in mind, I had to confront my nostalgia of the jalebi and the experience around eating street food. As Massey suggests, 'the imagination of going home so frequently means going 'back' in both space and time' (Massey, 2007). The sight, smell, taste, touch, feel, and every sense that came alive and it not only transported me to the few times I've had jalebi in Chandigarh or Delhi, but is also integral to my relationship with my parents, which heavily revolves around food – wherever we have lived but especially during our trips to India – again, there is a similar sense of feeding a desire that is fleeting as we didn't have access to such food growing up in South East Asia. My relationship to a lot of street food in India, therefore, is further complicated by my parents' relationship to a nostalgic food of their upbringing as they, too, have become diasporic Indians outside their home country. Massey describes her 'regrettable' memory of her mum making a family-favourite chocolate cake, with slight modification from how Massey and her sister remembered and loved it, only to be met with complaints of longing for 'the old chocolate cake' (ibid). Considering the implications of this rather everyday experience, Massey recognised the way going home meant 'time and space travel' to the past and sometimes, nostalgia can deny change.

I had made assumptions that for a jalebi to have integrity, it must be fried in front of me, and I duplicated my parent's criteria for street food that was formed in the past when they lived in India in the 80s. Now, fresh jalebi can be delivered and, as my recent visit to India corrects my old criteria – it doesn't have to be thin for it to be crispy. I also learnt Imarti, which is

Imarti

similar to a jalebi but made with urad dal flour instead of all-purpose flour, has improved vastly in taste and texture since my last memory of it in the 90s. I deemed it the unloved sibling of the jalebi and now stand corrected. And as my visits to Southall and East Ham have reaffirmed, neither do sweets need to be made in India. Such criteria itself or the 'cultural logic on which such suppositions are based often police the line between what can be deemed as authentic, cultural, and gendered citizenship and the performance of ethnicity. To be seen as 'Indian' demands a particular set of performative behaviour' (Mannur, 2009). In confronting my nostalgia, I had to confront the 'past' where food and the means of preparation, in my memory, remain unchanged. My (and my parents') taste defined our class, too, as our preference, tied to food and those who prepare it, has an aesthetic quality, where our consumption is based on acquired knowledge.

In a Whetstone Radio Collective series, *Taste of Place*, Anna Sulan Masing contends with issues of place, space, memory, and taste to think about how we can belong by learning from the past and looking at the future – themes pertinent to this research. In an episode titled 'Homecoming', Masing talks about visiting her family home in Sarawak and revisiting her favourite laksa stand. During her visit, she is surprised to learn that the auntie who runs the stall uses a store-bought laksa paste and initially considered it a 'disappointing fact' (Sulan Masing, 2022). She later confronts her romanticised and nostalgic view of cooking and cooks, noting there have been excellent laksa pastes produced in the last decade so why wouldn't she use a shortcut? This echoes not only a pursuit of assumed 'authenticity' in cuisine as discussed in the previous chapter with AC and EG, and in the following chapter, but also, the 'mythical mothers and grandmothers' as Sejal Sukhadwala points out as the tired trope of the hard working labour associated with women in the Global South.[28] There is a preservation of both time and place – the unchanging image of women doing the laborious task of carrying on traditional methods of cooking and the Global South as a place, stuck in the 'past', devoid of progress or modernisation of food practices. It also creates a precedent that food cannot change or be creative and any deviation would compromise our recollection of an idealised past. As Massey suggests,

> Nostalgia constitutively plays with notions of space and time… when nostalgia articulates space and time in such a way that it robs others of their histories (their stories), then indeed we need to rework nostalgia (Massey, 2007).

In the episode titled The Power of Storytelling, Sulan Masing speaks with anthropologist Mythri Jegathesan about the power of nostalgia, where she shares an important reflection – 'nostalgia is a decision. A decision to engage the past in a certain way' (Sulan Masing and Jegathesan, 2022). Just as Proust's memory of madeleines suggests, nostalgia can have more to do with the present than the past. For me, recalling jalebi in a certain way, was informed by multiple desires and sensories. The jalebi makes me feel closer to my parents in the present by recalling a past shared experience. This shared experience was almost always a nostalgic memory because I did not grow up in India. Southall becomes a proxy of 'past' in India and the jalebi plays like a portal to both my memories with my family and a present anchor of place in this South Asian community within London – a community I am still outside of, even if 'ethnically' bound. As all these writers concur, the past is not static. Nor, as Massey reminds us, are the places in which we form our experiences. 'Rethinking these spaces and histories as points of relation and affiliation, rather than in terms of roots and filiation, creates spaces for interrogating the contradictory layering of lives mapped in multiple geographic spaces - racial, ethnic, and sexual' (Mannur, 2009). Walking through Southall made me reconsider nostalgia and think of this neighbourhood not as a space of Indians or Punjabis, rather, as Homi Bhabha writes, a third space. This third space ensures

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[28] Sukhadwala, Sejal. "Why Do Indian Recipes Always Have to Come from Some Mythic Grandmother?." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 29 Dec. 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/dec/29/indian-recipes-mythic-grandmother-burden-tradition.

'that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicised and read anew' (37, Bhabha cited in Mannur, 2009). However, the tension of diaspora, food and memory takes shape in the High Street through street vendors, who duplicate, as the Amritsari *Kulcha* and *Jalebi* demonstrate, not only the food but the entire dining out experience. While South Asian food is fairly accessible in many parts of London, the street food nature of Southall felt unique, especially in the nostalgia it inspired of place, space, and time for South Asian diasporas.

Street Food – Southall and Restaurants

The 'Street Food' experience has become more visible in the restaurant dining experience. South Asian restaurants in the UK seem to favour popular street food items as part of 'starters' or 'snacks' on menus. Prior to living in London, I was unfamiliar with this practice and pleasantly surprised to find *bhel puri, paani puri, chaat, vada pao,* on several menus. This is also a growing trend in India, itself, where many restaurants are increasingly offering street food staples in restaurants. Overall, this food doesn't satisfy the kind of indulgence I associate with street food in India. However, it also made such food more visible and accessible since I am not often in places like Southall where I can easily find street vendors selling fresh paan or chaat. I took this curiosity further and connected with food writers who have either written about street food comprehensively and others who provided some commentary on the matter.

Street Food - Margin to Centre

Restaurants, as Jonathan Nunn writes in *London Feeds Itself*, 'fulfil a function of remembrance and transform the city into other cities'.[29] The addition of food associated with street vendors in restaurant menus transform a city like London with greater specificity – it is a literal escape into regions, famous city blocks, where such food is perhaps most popular or can be associated with memories and sensations (having paan from M Block in Delhi, *chaat* and *gol gappas* in 23 sector Chandigarh). Food scholar Krishnendu Ray argues that the experience of such street food eating is important because it pays 'attention to local, vernacular forms of connoisseurship visible in cities everywhere, especially in the Global South' (Ray, 2020). Ray suggests street food embodies a culture that can be overlooked by metropoles and what is generally considered 'good taste'. Ray uses this idea of 'counter-hegemonic politics of taste', as a progressive means of presenting an alternative to the 'global hierarchy of taste'. In doing so, he challenges the homogenised idea of national cuisine and the opportunity that such regional and local cuisine, particularly in the subaltern foodways, can inform us about the way people eat and share food, especially those belonging to diaspora where their identity becomes similarly homogenised. In my own conversations with Ray, he asserts, 'where there is a dialect, there is a cuisine. India has more than 20,000 dialects, hence cuisine'.

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[29] Nunn, Jonathan, et al. *London Feeds Itself.* Open City, 2022.

Ray's assessment echoes bell hooks' theory on margins to centre - where the experience of those in the margins presents a vantage point from which we can critique the dominant assumptions of culture (hooks, 1989). In this case, using street food as a means of having deeper engagement with a community and its local food practices – stripping away, to some extent, 'centre' of a nation and replacing it with the 'margins' of street food. He also uses street food to describe an act of desire and commensality, as seen by a crowd that usually forms around *gol gappa* stands. From my experience, the *gol gappa* etiquette is a mix of patience and pleasure - you wait your turn, hold your paper or steel bowl out, and wait for a filled *gol gappa* to be delicately placed and immediately eaten, then repeat – this, too, fulfils its own sense of nostalgia and romanticisation of a 'past' and pleasant conviviality of diners. Ray points out, 'customers never have *gol-gappas* at home or at a restaurant,' at least not in India. Street food 'transfers attention from the home, the restaurant, and the court, the three overworked domains of cuisine; it changes the flavour of the politics and poetics of good taste' (Ray, 2020) especially considering street food has so long been reduced as unrefined, unhygienic, or foods of the poor until recently – if served in places like Borough Market in London. Importantly, it introduces another avenue of food and space where the vendors on the Southall high street can reproduce a local food practice like the spiralling fermented jalebi dough or combining the many fillings of a complicated paan.

Ray furthers this idea of 'desire' or '*mazaa*' as a way such taste-making has now become a trend, where ostentatious ingredients and gimmicks are used to entice diners. This is partly because they 'stand up well compared to traditional peasant cuisine with their stewed yellows and browns because they are often raw and hence retain their colour (mangoes, coconuts, corn), or are fried or sweet' (ibid). Street Food is also consumed differently as it is built to be portable, 'typically eaten in small bites and often on sticks and improvised utensils that are incomparably photogenic' (ibid). Ray attributes some of this exposure of street food with visual and social media – where food has a commercial and social value as a thing of entertainment, hence, *mazaa*. While Ray and other scholars like Amita Baviskar detail street food culture in India, its impact on street vendors (many of whom are often migrants) and the informal economy of their business, what is of interest in this diasporic study is the 'reversal' of street food I have experienced in London, bringing to the fore the 'margin' of regional food to the literal plate.

Street (Food) Nostalgia and Reversal

As mentioned, street foods commonly found in South Asia have become part of menus in restaurants in the UK, leaning on their vibrancy and regional specificity, they offer the diner what Ray referred to as 'an exit from the tired idioms of Indian restaurant cuisine'. In my conversations with Ray, his explanation for this reversal of street food in restaurants was, in part, a recognition of gustatory nostalgia that isn't limited to 'home food' but acknowledging that the street was an important site of consumption for many South Asians living elsewhere. Ray noted this difference as 'domestic cuisine (for the home) and the other for unruly appetites'. This feels especially true when I consider my own interest in street food as an impulse purchase – I desire paan because it is an item of a home for which I have an appetite

but I am also equally compelled because I am not often in neighbourhoods where it is easily accessible and will indulge in one even if I am not craving one – it is a purely opportunistic purchase where my hunger is in my memory (Sutton, 2001). The importance of the sensorial experience is clear in his theorising of desire and pleasure for street food – it is something that feels lacking from the street food in the restaurant setting. As Ravinder Bhogal writes in her cookbook, *Jikoni* –

> Sure, there are a clutch of excellent restaurants serving tasty, sanitised street food in pristine surroundings, with crockery and cutlery, but you can't beat the appeal of bhel puri, prepared right in front of you with awe-inspiring speed and agility. This street-food snack is best eaten immediately, clumsily, and readily - straight out of the newspaper cone it comes in (Bhogal, 2020).

Nunn's take on this, from the perspective of a median British diner, is to highlight the importance of specificity, where they 'want things to be the way they are back home but aren't really interested in the actual modes of street food culture you would genuinely get in those cities'. In our conversation, Nunn admits he doesn't know of many people who are travelling to Wembley for *gol gappa* or bhel puri on the street but rather opt for the more convenient, more expensive restaurant experience.

The '*mazaa*' here is somewhat lost, the communal experience of the *gol gappa* etiquette replaced by a certain 'cleaning' of the street, the vendor, and the food itself. In fact, the popular Indian food retailer, Haldiram's, now sells at-home kits of *gol gappas*, complete with the fried puri dough and the flavoured water and chutney packets. From personal experience, at-home *gol gappas* do not satisfy in the same way – poking a hole in the surface of the globe-like puri is a delicate art and requires an attention and dexterity that I, at least, do not possess. The at-home packets of seasoning to which you add water falls short of the flavour I associate with the vendors. Similarly, a jalebi in a restaurant would not produce the exact same feeling of glee or pleasure I felt as when I witness the entire production of the frying dough that is then drenched in sugar syrup. However, for someone who has nothing to compare the experience to, the '*mazaa*' is created without having to travel to specific regions to enjoy the messy and flavourful recreations of street food – especially a *gol gappa* which gives you permission to play with your food. Even in India, during lockdown, it was reported that Google India saw a 107% increase in searches for *gol gappa* recipes, presumably by people who could not access the usually available street vendors nor perform a routine or activity of eating out amidst a pandemic.[30] In such cases, what is good enough, is pleasurable

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[30] Ramadurai, C. (2022) *Pani Puri: India's Favourite Street Food... at home?*, *BBC Travel*. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20200602-pani-puri-indias-favourite-street-food-at-home (Accessed: 24 October 2023).

enough and satiates desire and memories. Here, we can see how 'proximity' of desire is performed through our eating practices.

The 'reversal' of street food I refer to is the explosion of such food in parts of London, some idle trucks and pop-ups, and other designated stalls part of a larger market. Nunn claims London did not have much of a street food culture pre-2010, bar the odd newsstand or similar stalls selling street food 'in an ad-hoc way but laws on this kind of stuff meant that it got shut down fairly quickly'. Nunn asserts the role of property dealers catapulted street food as developers recognised the utility such a business could provide in occupying pseudo public spaces. London Pop-ups, a website (and the various social media platforms combined) keeps a tally on the various pop-ups around London. While they include a variety of events from shopping to galleries, food and drink are the most popular. London now is a site of pop-up markets from Maltby Street Market, Coal Drops Yard, Pop-up Brixon, to several in a variety of London neighbourhoods. These street food markets do not exactly resemble the street food vendors in Southall, but they rely on the similar narrative of colourful, attractive, indulgent food that Ray would probably as satiating the 'unruly' appetite. The 'reversal' takes the food and makes it 'dirty' by the addition of lavish or ostentatious ingredients. For example, London Pop-ups demonstrates a variety of street food cuisine such as Baba G's or Bhangra burger, which offers Indian-inspired burgers. Their 'Crazy Lamb Jalfrezi Burger' is a 'spiced lamb burger with mint cumin raita, mango pulp, coriander and onion salsa with a crispy bhaji'. A burger which combines relatively familiar aspects of Anglo-Indian food – mango chutney, raita, bhaji – and fits it an indulgent and 'dirty' burger. Moreover, these projects 'an image of urban cool and hipness: edible art for the palate in no small measure' (Mannur, 2022).

The reversal here is also how food terms are associated with the food and the culture from which it derives. 'Dirty', generally, would represent a lack of refinement, something that also echoes quality and cost, and was for a long time, associated with street food – unsanitary. The reversal in which street food is 'sanitised' in restaurants, now echoes improved quality and enhanced cost. It also changes the atmosphere and sensorial experience attached with street food – the scent, the visible labour – are also sanitised in the restaurant setting.

Food vernacular is important – food, as has long been demonstrated, is more than the meal for mundane consumption but extends to the people who prepare it and to the community it represents. In 2020, Chef Philli Mattin claimed on her Instagram page that she was refining 'dirty' Asian food, which was met with criticism not least because it appeared as if she was reducing a continent to one food identity. In her apology, also issued on Instagram, she

Gol Gappas

clarified the use of 'dirty' was not to reflect 'unclean or unhygienic' but food 'to be dirty is indulgent street food; food that comforts you as in going for a dirty burger'.[31] It is curious, then, how labels are attached to food and the environment in which they are served. When does language change and who dictates the change? While dirty is another way of describing 'indulgent', 'unusual' can be another way of sanitising language for something considered 'strange' or 'alien'. The English language may also be limited in the vocabulary it has for describing non-European food. While Asian food becomes more ubiquitous, the vocabulary does not appropriately describe the food itself besides reproducing its own 'tired idioms' of exotic or re-emphasising its difference from known European food. As Ray claims,

> *Mazaa* in vernacular foods shifts the geographic focus away from the Euro American world to places such as Southeast Asia, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where some of the most interesting food is from the street and where restaurant food can be derivative; it transfers attention from the home, the restaurant and the court, the three overworked domains of cuisine; it changes the flavour of the politics and poetics of good taste; Viewed from the bottom up, much street food is a study not only of *mazaa* but also of labour, micro-entrepreneurship, regulatory circumvention and legal innovation (Ray, 2020).

Part of the food reversal of 'street' to 'restaurant' and 'global south' to 'global north' is also an attempt to improve on the image of a bowl of curry to something more aesthetically pleasing – plating and enhancing the 'look' to suit a more cosmopolitan appeal for consumers. Ray's argument is helpful to describe this food vernacular as words are used to employ something in contrast to that of Western cuisine, reimagine what is aesthetically beautiful – again, asserting the importance of challenging the global hierarchy of taste. This ambivalence of 'modern' and 'traditional' interpretations of cuisine and their cultural significance is well demonstrated by a quick search on Guardian's dedicated Food site, under 'Indian Food and Drink'. Results will include 'simple', 'budget' or daunting reviews of longstanding places with articles such as 'The end of the boom for Birmingham's Balti Triangle' and 'HS2 threatens one of UK's best Indian food streets'. However, this space also includes innovation from food writers like Bhogal whose restaurant, *Jikoni*, is proudly a 'no borders kitchen', and boasts her 'inauthentic recipes'.

The humble *gol gappa* served on a plate while the lamb *jalfrezi* is stuffed between two buns, the manner and space of consumption is at odds with how the two distinct dishes began. While this reversal certainly requires more research and dedicated enquiry – especially regarding economic reasons and the consumer's capacity and motivation to spend on products – what is useful here is what this reversal reveals for food and culture of a diaspora. Again, there is *mazaa*, even if sanitised, as being 'good enough', where the sensation of eating an explosion of flavours that is a *gol gappa* travels from the margin of local street

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[31]Armitage-Mattin, Philli, 'I wanted to clarify my position - I never said "Asian food is dirty." (Instagram). 29 November 2020. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CIMEvgInFxA/?hl=en (Accessed: October 20, 2023).

cooking to the centre. It is done so in a setting without the mess or hassle of the outdoor elements, which, at times, can be part of the *mazaa*. Meanwhile, the jalfrezi burger may not serve a nostalgia of any one regional cuisine or street in the 'homeland' of South Asia, it can produce a nostalgia of 'homing' of the British-Asian diaspora, and another form of *mazaa* in seeing how food can be creative and hybrid. The representation of such South Asian flavours in street-food has significant implications for what street food also means to the city.

<u>Southall Street Nostalgia</u>

Southall's street food doesn't offer what markets in Zone 1 and 2 London offers. The *'mazaa'* of eating at the Southall vendors is a nod to nostalgia. Discussions on street food and vendors in neighbourhoods often invite a discourse on gentrification – how spaces in neighbourhoods are developed and used, and who is the target audience and what price point are these familiar street food items being sold. While I do not want to avoid the importance of this, it is a complex conversation best addressed elsewhere. I raise it nonetheless to offer a contrast to Zone 1 and 2 street food places to what is available in Southall. What this high street offers is an 'emotional thickness' for the diaspora in West London (Boccagni, 2022). The everyday exchanges that take place on the Southall high street and the street food stalls feel part of the infrastructure of the neighbourhood, contributing to social and communal relationships in the area. The high street becomes a space that encourages social interaction, which…

> range from a very minimal connection, such as a greeting between acquaintances or between shoppers and traders, to extended conversations between those who have met up in the market, or extended interactions between stallholders and the customers they serve (14, Watson and Studdert 2006, cited in Rhys-Taylor, 2013).

While the stalls give an appearance or have an assumption of impermanence, there is also a visible kinship between those working at the shop and the stalls that extend beyond them. Importantly, they are not food trucks that can set up shop in new locations, but consistent in their operation on this road. Covering a mile or so long walk, many stalls offer a similar menu of chaat, sweet corn, and samosa – the utensils and plates were often similar from stall to stall. During my visits, many of those working the stalls were likely to be found inside the shops, only paying attention to the stand if there is a customer. This space of business becomes more than an exchange of goods but a place where such connections and interactions 'characterise the social fabric of the locale' (Rhys-Taylor, 2013). Such places also make labour more visible – the work of preparing food is happening in front of you.

However, something about these stalls feels like they can exist in Southall (or East Ham and other South Asian diaspora-heavy neighbourhoods) but not in the same way in Central London. The purpose is not to feed the metropolitan passerby but serves the immediate community. Taking further the question of 'authenticity', what does 'gatekeeping' food look like? Much of the conversation surrounding gatekeeping in public discourse focuses on European, mostly Italian cuisine – Current Far-Right Prime Minister Meloni has prioritised

'Food Sovereignty' as a means of defending the nation. However, with cuisines that are subverting the global hierarchy of taste, gatekeeping becomes synonymous with fears of cultural misappropriation. With a possibility of reproducing racial stereotypes and misrepresentation of cuisine and culture, there is fear that nuances in the exchange of food (preparing, ordering, the language) may be lost. Similar to our understanding of diaspora, there is a desire to protect and, importantly, not assimilate or adapt – to retain power. Perhaps other reasons for these stalls to remain uniquely defined by their proximity to streets in South Asia, serving a predominantly South Asian community is to have a breather from the 'outside' Southall boundaries, where the diaspora is minoritised in the centre of London. Ray, on culinary misappropriation writes,

> Kyla Wazana Tompkins's *Racial Indigestion* (2012) opens with the silent film "The Gator and the Pickaninny," depicting a theatrical scene in which a Black child is eaten by a gator to reveal the relationship between eating, racial identity, and political inequality. She interrogates five instances of eating practices that fuse the biological with the cultural to produce a typology of racial incorporation in metaphor and metonymy. She sharply notes that "not unlike the current foodie moment, and perhaps original to it, eating culture [in the nineteenth-century United States] played a significant part in the privileging of whiteness…Such anxious girding of the boundaries of whiteness, however, could only happen where those boundaries were threatened, and it is exactly as a site of racial anxiety that eating is most productively read' (Tompkins, 2012) (Ray, 2018).

The gustatory experience may not be an exact duplicate of chaat places in Delhi or Chandigarh, but the function of these stalls is greater than the food itself. The familiar enough taste 'is also a performance of the pleasure-seeking body' (Ray, 2020) and this act of pleasure-seeking is a way of connecting to the past through food and the space itself where I can eat chaat and look at the shiny bangles and bindis at the same time as one might do in South Asia. The level of similarity of place and food varies – the jalebi was as I remembered it in India but the chaat was not. However, a combination of the smell, touch, taste, and other factors allows me to fill in the blanks and arrive at a good-enough experience of feeling at a South Asian 'home'. While it is different from the food of 'homeland', the homing of street food in Southall 'acknowledges that the place of origin is hardly home anymore. The need to feel at home survives, instead, and is to be nourished regardless of territorial underpinnings' (Boccagni, 2022). Importantly, for many, it becomes 'homely-enough' (ibid). This is especially the case for myself and people like me who have multiple homes and therefore, meaning and memories of home. Ruba Salih, researching the life of Moroccan women in Italy, suggests the ways in which multiple homes are represented in one space through objects and food where 'women articulate and give meaning to the spaces they inhabit through the objects they bring back and forth' (Salih, 2001). Food, and variety of it, travels back and forth with purpose and can exist in a space and be a repository of multiplicity homes and stories.

Mimicry and Ambivalence

To linger on the aforementioned jalfrezi burger, an amalgamation of cuisines, this 'hybrid' food is a material example of what Homi Bhabha would call a form of 'colonial presence', described as 'always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference' (Bhabha, 1985). Bhabha's understanding of the encounter of colonised and coloniser, fraught with violence and power, also meant the interaction of the two led to a complex production of hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence. Bhabha traces the colonial discourse from the civilising mission to that of colonial imagination where mimicry is a 'sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualises power' (ibid). There are perhaps many ways to interpret what Bhabha meant but it's helpful to consider the ambivalence from the perspective of the colonised and the colonisers. The colonised performed a mimicry of the powerful colonisers given their hegemony and authority over the subcontinent. However, this mimicry, as Bhabha argues, was actually a colonial 'policy' intended to create Indian subjects to perform European/British behaviours, aesthetics, and thinking. Bhabha, therefore, theorises 'mimicry' as a 'desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha, 1984). The English language, for example, was a way to translate and communicate between the colonised and the colonisers and became a marker of progress and advancement for many who internalised the English sensibilities. Bhabha quotes Macaulay's *Infamous Minute* on Indian Education advocating for 'a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect' (Bhabha, 1984). Bhabha's take on this mimicry as 'incomplete' suggests there is a performance of the English identity that also has the potential to pose a challenge which 'mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable' (ibid). In other words, the mimicry itself becomes a means of exposing the limitations of the power that was wielded during colonisation and finding solidarity to fight for independence.

Mimicry, in Bhabha's vision, is subversive. However, mimicry can also be seen as a betrayal of tradition or native identity. The two positions are in juxtaposition to one another, creating the ambivalence as to which identity is being performed and who it benefits. Colonial mimicry, again, is 'the same, but not quite', which results in a camouflage of the self, contributing to an ambivalence of in-betweenness. Mimicry, from the perspective of the colonised, at times, feels in opposition to the 'authentic' self. To bring back the jalfrezi burger, there would be many opposed to this as a subjugation of authentic Indian taste, altered for a British audience. However, as Bhabha would argue, the meeting of these seemingly conflicting positions fails to recognise what the encounter itself produces – a hybridity that is not about partial recognition of two disparate identities, but an identity created as part of the process of an interaction. However, as Bhabha warns us, 'the question of representation of difference is therefore always a problem of authority', which is where I see the conflict of negotiation and ambivalence truly taking shape. Certain aspects can be mimicked – the English language, cultural taste, sensibilities, language of 'liberty' and

'freedom', however, certain identities cannot be changed such as caste, colour, and more. Struggles over authority and control are also not simply confined between the colonised and coloniser, but exist within communities – especially in gender relations, as we'll soon see in the focus group with SBS.

Using food as an example, the 'hybrid' cuisines 'mimic' in a few ways. As Ray suggests, the global hierarchy of taste prefers European/Western cuisine and aesthetic, which trickles down to not only how much such meals cost but is also representative of the cultural capital and taste that informs an identity of the consumer. South Asian food, in opposition, has long been cheap and considered smelly, now has become the exotic and adventurous, which also says something of the cosmopolitan consumer. The manner in which South Asian food has 'mimicked' British taste can be anything from adjusting spice, substitution to available ingredients, to incorporating the 'encounter' of two cuisines, through repetition, and eventually forming its own cuisine. In this regard, both cuisines are camouflaged, where mimicry raises the question of what can be considered the 'hierarchy' of taste itself. Wazana Tompkins' passage and bell hooks' 'eating the other' unpack the desire of the 'other', where the consumption and commodification of a racialised or 'ethnic' cuisine becomes part of the encounter of the colonised and coloniser, replaying the power struggles that cannot be erased by mimicry. Moreover, such 'utopic desires imagine eating to be a solution to the fractious malaises of the world and are predicated on a sentimentalised and dehistoricised understanding of the power of consumption' (Mannur, 2009).

However, the ambivalence is furthered by a sense of 'progress' where 'the gustatory relish for the food of others may help contribute to an appreciation of their presence in the national community' (Flowers and Swan, 2017). The ambivalence of the coloniser sees the colonised as inferior, yet 'exotic'. Whereas the ambivalence of the colonised sees the power-inflicting colonisers as holding a position of authority, but with disdain. It is useful to think of these historical pinning's of ambivalence to further the argument of the politics of ambivalence as being a useful and productive place from which one negotiates their belonging. Negotiation, therefore, becomes a way of working through these ambivalences. In the following section, I take some of these concepts developed here through the aid of food to explore ambivalence and cruel optimism for women who engage with Southall Black Sisters.

Part 2

Homing and Belonging - Southall Black Sisters

To begin this section, I want to re-emphasise some of the tensions explored in this chapter and elsewhere – Hopefully, it is now well-established there is no fixity of belonging, place, and space. Mariana Ortega, instead, argues for a different approach to belonging all together by advocating for Carrillo Rowe's 'politics of relations' where 'locations are formed by a series of affective and political ties with others' to think of conditions that allow for the 'possibility of belonging' (Ortega, 2014). Food, and the multiplicity of home, reimagines

belonging as not a target or destination, but an attribute that remains open-ended to such possibilities.

> People's sense of being at home is no longer necessarily tied to one location, nor a recollection of the past. At the same time, as empirical research shows, it is unlikely to lose any connection with a material basis. While our ways of homing involve a variety of non-domestic contexts, they do need a context nonetheless; not necessarily 'a large space, but a space there must be', Douglas (1991, 289) famously wrote, 'for home starts by bringing some space under control.'' (Boccagni, 2022).

To Bhabha's point, the problem of authority is central in the space of homing. There is an inherent tension between space and control – to feel at home, and to have autonomy over one's life can be challenged by the various vertical and horizontal relationships of state, institutions, to everyday interactions with employers, people in the community, and others – challenging the politics of relations that allow for a possibility of belonging. Berlant and Michael Hardt think of the power to be affected and the control over decision-making as a recognition of the 'power of the world outside of us', where 'to identify the locus of decision or acting or being acted upon, we need to look to not the one but the consistent relation among the many' (Hardt, 2015). In other words, Berlant and Hardt are encouraging a more realistic understanding of power – not to reduce its absence to powerlessness, but to recognise which and how our relationships have an *affect* in our everyday life. Berlant and Hardt use 'affect' to distinguish between the effect of something – what causes the condition to change. Using affect allows the 'pains, pleasures, frustrations, and longing' to 'understand how people manage in this world to create new intimacies, new bonds, and new forms of life' (Hardt, 2015). Therefore, I am using 'affect' to expand on ambivalence. How these emotions and the ambivalence of longing to belong is articulated by the participants.

The participants' personal stories share more than narratives of memories, but they also offer their cultural and political analysis of the space they occupy. Their everyday interactions with institutions, state, policies, and people have informed the themes which make up this project, with a particular focus on their social relationships. In the following section, I adjust my attention from a forensic look at food to a focus group organised and supported by Southall Black Sisters. The focus remains the personal stories shared by these women, but importantly, this section aims to unpack the complexity between politics and feelings – to highlight the relationships these women maintain, and the 'affect' they have before we can understand how they articulate their belonging. Hardt relies on and links the work of Foucault and Deleuzian politics of pleasure and politics of desire respectively to argue that the power of affect as a productive space from which to struggle towards the 'good life', or, a sense of belonging, noting that this is process is riddled with conflict and such feelings are often contradictory (Hardt, 2015). I meditate on the very tension between the politics of belonging, which introduces the explicit and implicit, hostile, shifting, racist policies and the actions that become an opposition to such exclusions, all while dealing with the ambivalence of reality and desire that surrounds migration. Belonging is not as simple as a decision or choice where one can decide to 'take control' as an 'act of sovereign will', but a mediation of conflicting

and complex relationships and experiences (ibid). As I have claimed elsewhere in this thesis (Chapter 3), there is often a separation in literature between the politics of belonging and cultural belonging. In this focus group, the reality of their legal status cannot be reduced simply to the vertical structures of power but shape their everyday interactions. In my research, particularly through this focus group, it is exactly the emotional attachments and cultural significance that allow space for ambivalence, difference, and solidarities in political resistance.

Southall Black Sisters Focus Group

The moment I walked in the multipurpose room in the Church space reserved for SBS, I was treated as a new member of the group and immediately offered tea and snacks by several women. As in many South Asian spaces tend to be, this is how people welcome and communicate – they will also insist on offering have food more than once. The group of women crowded the entrance, pacing between the small kitchen space and the main room. There were samosas and the accompanying chutneys, along with biscuits, and unlimited tea. It was a noticeable routine for this group which meets monthly. They were considerate of one another, knew how some of their friends took their tea, and were chatty as if they hadn't seen each other for a while. While the group is accustomed to meeting once a month, this came to a halt during the pandemic. This afternoon was their first meeting with SBS since the beginning of COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdowns. It was apparent how much there was to catch up on, and importantly, there was a palpable feeling that there had been something missing while they weren't able to gather in person.

The space was large – we occupied part of the auditorium, and the tables and chairs were arranged as if it were a classroom. We patiently waited as those occupying the room were gathering their construction paper and colouring pens, having finished an art class. The space would similarly oscillate between feeling like an actual classroom where we could have easily gathered for an art project and a living room, depending on the kind of conversation we were having. Initially, the one-word responses felt like I was in a classroom whereas the lengthier, tangential comments felt like we were in a shared living space where we dwell on our stories with snacks and tea in hand. The solo SBS staff member sat in the very front, briefly introduced my research and what kind of questions I will be asking them, while trying to sort out the necessary paperwork. It appeared as if the participants were receiving reimbursements for their travel to this meeting. I could overhear some conversation where a participant misplaced their receipts or had concerns of going over their spending limit. The SBS staffer contributed to the classroom feel, managing these monthly meetings, performing pastoral care, and sometimes, being authoritative if they were speaking too much or loudly. Given her familiarity with everyone in the room, she would speak in Hindi or Urdu, where the language change made the environment feel more personal – it mimicked the sensorial experience of being at the jalebi junction, there was a sense of belonging to a diaspora in the room. The malleability of the room felt as multipurpose as the living room in a home – sometimes a dining room, sometimes a place to greet guests, a place to rest – this space became the site of our focus group. Importantly, it was a place that required your undivided

attention from the SBS staff member, the other women in the room, and this afternoon, from me. No one looked at their phones, their hands busy with samosas or the routine of taking sips of tea.

Southall Black Sisters is a not-for-profit organisation that was established in 1979. They support the rights and needs of Black, Asian and minoritised women. While based in Southall, their work has a national reach, often engaging with other like-minded organisations to advocate for women experiencing violence, abuse, and offer services from counselling, casework management, to specialist advice. Their efforts are at the forefront of several historical moments from organising vital campaigns against virginity testing of Asian immigrant women in 1979, supporting women on strike for union and labour rights, to a number of demonstrations following cases of domestic abuse (and murder) of women, including securing the first-ever conviction of a man in a marital rape case in the Asian context. SBS has become synonymous with advocacy that runs the gamut of holding the state accountable for its policies that disproportionately affect Black, Asian, and minoritised women to challenging traditional and state patriarchy that is reproduced daily and privately. Not only have they become known for their advocacy nationally, but they are a fixture in Southall – there are rarely any recordings (writing or other media) on this neighbourhood that I came across that do not mention its history of resistance, and therefore, SBS. However, while the organisation's work often centres domestic abuse, my engagement with SBS and the participants is not specific to just their experience of violence. Instead, it is a conversation on their everyday lives, which naturally involves their experiences that led them to seek SBS.

SBS has shown the struggles of women within their communities, recognising the experiences are not only against the wider political exclusions but also that of a singular identity imposed on a diaspora that widely upholds the image of a submissive Asian woman. As Pragna Patel, longstanding Director of SBS until 2022, noted 'Initially SBS faced much hostility and opposition, emanating not only from the conservative and traditional forces within Southall, but also from the left-wing progressive men with whom many in SBS had fought side-by-side in the major anti-racist struggles in the 1970s and 1980s' (Patel, 2001). For those outside of the Asian community, there is a tension in showing solidarity against racist struggles, while assuming a position to comment on assumed cultural traditions. For example, commenting against gender discrimination and stereotypes becomes conflated with speaking against the diaspora's assumed 'culture'. Critiquing patriarchy translates to critiquing the culture or religion of the 'other'. Many of the women who seek SBS have experienced violence or injustice at the hands of their husbands or families, communities or by the state. SBS is uniquely positioned to challenge such patriarchal violence as an organisation that is representative of the community it serves.

This section, therefore, explores the belonging of these women who are facing a form of violence privately and/or publicly. While food is a central theme throughout this thesis, it takes on a peripheral character in this section, as there was not enough time in the hour-long interview. Additionally, a lot of the time, cooking and eating can be more functional – the feeling of hybridity and class status will also be discussed. However, food remains part of the

conversation and always in the background as the smell of hot samosas perfume the room. I begin with basic background information of the participants and the focus group and delve into examining ambivalence and cruel optimism in greater length as it pertains to the participants.

<u>Focus Group Background Information</u>

Southall is a place of importance for this project. As covered at the start of the chapter, the history of the neighbourhood against a backdrop of colonisation and South Asian migration meant Southall was and remains embroiled in conflict of place, space, and belonging. SBS, by extension, is an important character within this discourse of rights, power, and place. The history of Southall migration is a contestation of space and boundaries – as Massey claims, 'the decisions about which mobilities to allow and which not, and about how open, or how closed, our places are to be… all these things, rather than being based on some external principles, are in fact expressions of, and exercises in social power' (Massey, 1996). SBS' role is to upset this social power by advocating for those disproportionately affected by the state and/or everyday interactions. Boundary making (physical and imaginary) – when simplified can be understood as exclusion and inclusion – which is also how Yuval-Davis conceptualises the politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Therefore, to explore Southall and the belonging of South Asian women who live or commute through Southall is to engage with SBS and those who use their services.

I connected with SBS during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 – a challenging time for most but particularly those SBS works with. The lockdown measures meant people were to remain in their homes to prevent the spread of the virus. Home, however, isn't always a safe place as many women were forced to stay indoors with their abusers. As a response to '16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence', SBS highlighted the stories of six women and their 16 days in lockdown. Some of their concerns were similar – almost all had attempted to receive some support from council but had no recourse to public funds, therefore, no aid from the government. With no alternative to safe housing or government support, some (60% of SBS users) [32] were trapped in their abusive environments, facing worse violence than before as a result of the lockdown, what has also been described as 'double pandemic' (ibid). Many reported facing food insecurity, increased anxiety, and a heightened sense of loneliness. This was further complicated by women that had little to no access to the internet, were pregnant, or elderly women who were more vulnerable to COVID. Their struggles were exacerbated by the lockdown – visa appointments pushed back, shrinking employment opportunities, and considerable setbacks to any progress made to their recovery and settlement in the UK. There is a greater nuanced conversation to be had about the burden and responsibility faced by these women as they respond to an organised exclusion by state. This is some of what Part 2 of this chapter aims to address.

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[32] Dharni, K. (2023) *#16days my life under lockdown*, *Southall Black Sisters*. Available at: https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/news/16days-my-life-under-lockdown/ (Accessed: 25 October 2023).

In preparation for the focus group and to uphold confidentiality, there was only some basic background information SBS shared regarding the participants. Generally, SBS offers information, counselling, advocacy on a number of interrelated issues from forced marriage, immigration & asylum, housing and homelessness, policing and crime, racism, and more. They advise women in English, Hindi, Punjabi, Gujarati, Urdu and can arrange interpretation in other languages.[33] During the lockdown, SBS conducted weekly welfare checks, provided counselling sessions over the phone, provided food vouchers and care packages. The holistic and inclusive approach, the name recognition of SBS, and the community it serves is apparent in the number of women in this meeting and how long they've been associated with SBS. The women who were present for this monthly meeting and therefore, agreed to participate in my research, had all experienced domestic violence and abuse. Many, as a result, have interacted with the police and received support through the NHS. Their relationship with the Home Office, as they later on describe, is always in flux, a 'limbo state' as one participant claimed – some in the UK as asylum seekers, others on dependent visas through marriage. Their status with the Home Office, and by extension, the UK, impacts their everyday experience - the spaces they live and travel, their access to food and other resources, their relationships, their precarity and much more. While the majority of the women were of Asian background, ranging from India, Pakistan, Kashmir, Nepal, and Afghanistan. There were also a few women from Nigeria, Congo, Jamaica, and Zimbabwe. SBS, after all, is a service for black and brown women, and it is reflected in this group. While there is an obvious gendered and racialised nature to both the entire dissertation and to SBS, as Brah writes in her research of Sikh women, these identities are not autonomous but heterogenous and enmeshed in other everyday experiences. For safety, there were certain things I was not privy to – I did not learn names nor ages, although everyone was an adult, above the age of 18. 17 out of 18 women who participated were born outside of the country, with half of the women having lived in London for over 10 years. Given the majority of South Asians who preferred I speak in Punjabi, Hindi or Urdu, the focus group was conducted in a mixture of English, Punjabi, Hindi, and Urdu.

It is important to note, as I have mentioned elsewhere in the thesis, the different backgrounds of the women who have participated in this research. The focus group participants stand out from the other participants in the research given their legal status in the UK and while I do not offer a legal analysis of their position, I investigate the implications of their precarity in their everyday life. It is these differences that reflect the broad category of 'South Asian women' – the difference of status, class, religion, sexuality, and more contribute to how we understand the experiences of 'South Asian women'. These different positions matter because this research does not make claims for a singular experience but, rather, shows the heterogeneity of the diaspora. The similarities and differences are what make the experiences of belonging. Throughout the roughly hour-long interview, the conversations revealed some invaluable information about the politics and language of belonging – of what the 'good life'

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[33] *Our services* (2023) *Southall Black Sisters*. Available at: https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/services/ (Accessed: 25 October 2023).

means for these women. I begin with how the participants understood 'belonging', what that word and feeling means in the context of a South Asian culture, and the role of time in understanding the promise of belonging over time.

Language of Belonging

'Compared to where I was born, girls have value and freedom here', says a participant who recently migrated to London. I had to speak in a mix of Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, and English and faced the inevitable difficulty of translating 'belonging'. As noted by Marco Antonsich, by way of French and Italian translations of 'belonging', the literal translation would rarely be used in those languages. Moreover, the discourse of belonging often appears predominantly in English language scholarship. This 'corroborates the idea that belonging is a semantically complex notion' (Antonsich, 2010) as evident by my own translations within the focus group, attempting to find a way to communicate 'belonging'. Arjun Appadurai, while describing how 'native' can be understood, suggests 'political narratives that govern communication' can be an issue of semantics and pragmatic in nature. Semantic here would be 'the extent that words (and their lexical equivalents) require careful translation from context to context in their global movements; and pragmatic to the extent that the use of these words by political actors and their audiences may be subject to very different sets of contextual conventions that mediate their translation to public politics' (Appadurai, 1990). The challenge of describing what feels like a self-explanatory term is relying on my interpretation of the semantic, pragmatic, and theoretical concept of 'belonging' for the group and the gap in language – my proficiency in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi was challenged, as was the case for the SBS staff member who was thinking of exact translations. Instead, belonging became about approximations as we translated from Hindi, Punjabi, to Urdu. The exercise of describing belonging, itself, was informative and hybrid – the Afghan women who understood Urdu would translate for another in Pashto. Both these participants, from Kabul, were Bollywood fans and understood a mixture of Hindi and Urdu (Hindustani as it was once known) as a result. While there are implications to the linguistic construction of belonging (as aptly covered in the book Language and Belonging by Rita Tamara Vallentin)[34], I do not delve much into this topic except to note how the concept of 'belonging' was stretched in the focus group.

Sambandh, for example, translates back to English as 'belonging to' and is about relationships and/or membership. I was cautious about using language of ethnicity, race, or nationality to avoid immediately conflating belonging with exclusively political rhetoric and notions of identity or citizenship. For this research, I rely on Yuval-Davis's definition of belonging as emotional attachment before categorising the ways it is politicised and threatened. Therefore, in my attempt to use other words to explain 'belonging', it is understood by the group as 'safety' – thinking of belonging, first, as an emotion, without the direct political implications of the word.

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[34] Vallentin, R.T. (2019) *Language and belonging local categories and practices in a Guatemalan Highland Community*. Berlin: Peter Lang.

Safety is a meaningful word for anyone and particularly these women, all of whom are survivors of abuse and domestic violence. Threat here isn't an abstract or theoretical figure but a lived experience. I did not ask directly about their experience of domestic abuse – I am not trained for such conversations nor was this the aim of the focus group. However, their experiences with partners or families had led many to migrate to the UK, to seek SBS, and as such, was relevant to many stories. There was a sense of comfort in the room – many spoke with an earnest confidence of their personal and physical safety, having managed to escape conditions of everyday violence. This environment has become a 'foundation of strength', shared a participant. The space SBS provides might appear, at a glance, unremarkable – it is an auditorium after all. What it achieves, however, is a space where these women can care for themselves and for others. It is a classroom, living room, and a dining area – the care of listening, feeding, and providing support is extended beyond the 'traditional' home to a public/private space. Importantly, this space is political as it deals with issues on multiple levels, of domestic abuse privately and of public exclusions by state, city and/or community. The discussions around the auditorium contribute to the feeling of safety and of belonging – through membership and relationship, of *sambandh* with one another and SBS at large because this space and network keep the violence they have experienced and continue to experience on the outside.

Belonging, as far as their immediate safety was concerned, was a feeling of security in this space. Belonging became a sense of autonomy because their forced 'belonging' to an abusive family had been disrupted and a new sense of belonging had been evoked by either migrating to London or finding home with SBS. I want to expand on the idea of 'safety' in belonging as a large part of why many were in the room to begin with. I also want to highlight, given the nature of this focus group, I am not afforded the time and more casual conversation as is the case with the participants in East Ham or the chefs in the following chapter. Instead, I tease out the stories that two participants in particular, FN and SH, share. I use their narratives to further the points made both in scholarship and to theorise the politics of belonging through ambivalence as argued in this thesis.

'Belonging To…'

A young woman, FN, from Kashmir shared her experience of London and finding SBS in Urdu. FN has been living in London for 3 months now and yet the way she shares her story feels like years have passed. Her family arranged her marriage to a Kashmiri man living in London. Shortly after the wedding in her hometown in Kashmir, her new husband returned to London while she waited for her paperwork and dependent visa. Her family was responsible for all the costs associated with filing for visas and the travel arrangements. Once her passport was freshly stamped with a British visa, FN travelled to London expecting to be greeted by her husband, but instead recognised no one at the airport. She was unsure of what to do, waited at Heathrow arrivals for hours until she eventually made her way to Southall, having some vague idea of the community in the area. She went to the Gurdwara close to the station, aware that she could at least get a free meal. Gurdwaras have a longstanding tradition

of langar, a free community kitchen and the Southall Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabaha (SGSSS) offers as many as 20,000 vegetarian meals a week to anyone visiting the Gurdwara.[35] The Gurdwara opened in 1964 after holding initial programming in temporary locations. With an incoming community of Malaysian and Singaporean Sikhs, there was a growing need for larger space where the physical structure 'acted as a temporary refuge, transit point, and a community-cum-social point'[36]. SGSSS also has a space dedicated to safeguarding situations for anyone facing immediate danger, issues of abuse, or in need of support. The Gurdwara became a place of refuge that eventually connected FN with SBS, making the organisation the first call before the police or NHS. The Gurdwara, as it turns out, has routinely supported people in distress and forwarded them to known services such as SBS. 'I found a family at SBS' FN says as she looks around the room.

For the first few weeks, FN was staying with people she met at the Gurdwara, was receiving support through SBS and was able to get in touch with her family in Kashmir. Her family eventually contacted the husband and while they never got a satisfactory response as to what happened, they urged FN to seek her negligent spouse and carry out her responsibilities as a wife. FN's act of self-reliance in this situation was seen as something 'shameful' by her community and family back home. There was an 'erosion of all identity other than that of a wife' (Wilson, 2006) forcing FN back to her husband's home, where eventually became subject to his abuse. In Amrit Wilson's interviews with South Asian women in Britain, she notes the experience of women speaking out against abuse in the family – 'if she had suffered in silence, *izzat* would not have been damaged, and that conversely, *izzat* was endangered not so much by the abuse itself as by the exposure of the abuser' (ibid). FN's act of approaching SBS and eventually involving the police was seen as a greater insult than her husband's neglect, which eventually became the justification for his abuse, and a loss of her family's *izzat*, or respect. FN's belonging is complicated not only by the fact that she is married to an abusive husband, but that her 'belonging' to the UK is also contingent on this relationship. As Wilson suggests, 'a woman is regarded as belonging first to the men in her family, then to the men in her husband's family but never to herself' (ibid). Her belonging is also extended from her family to the community itself, which reinforces a patriarchal gaze should she leave the protection of the men in her life. FN, therefore, not only damages the *izzat* of her family, her husband's family, the community both in London and in Kashmir, but is also left without recognition granted by the state on the terms of her upholding those relationships. As the following section shows, the 'protection' of the state isn't granted to everyone in the same way, as demonstrated by the migrant women of the subcontinent.

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[35] *About us - gurdwara sri guru Singh Sabha Southall: Sikh temple southall |* (2022) *Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall | Sikh Temple Southall |*. Available at: https://sgsss.org/about_us/ (Accessed: 25 October 2023).

[36] Singh Purewal, B. (2019) *Home - Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha Southall | sikh temple southall*, *Sri Guru Singh Sabha (Southall) A History*. Available at: https://sgsss.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Gurdwara-Exhibition.pdf (Accessed: 25 October 2023).

<u>State and Services</u>

FN's first months in London were a mix of finding a community within the space of the Gurdwara and support from SBS, while living in an unsafe space. FN, speaking in Urdu, is able to better explain her feelings, describing the isolation she felt in her husband's home and the distance from her own family in Kashmir. FN does not dwell on her past, however, and spends more time talking about the eventual community she found in the Gurdwara and SBS. While facing abuse in her husband's home, she recalled her experience of SBS in the early days of her life in London. Having exposure to the Gurdwara and SBS meant FN was 'made aware of the spaces within this community which makes women's struggle possible' (Wilson, 2006) and eventually gave her the opportunity and ability to leave her husband, knowing she had a community to rely on. It is in these precarious situations where women are stuck between family, state, and are looking to access their community of resistance and solidarity. FN knew leaving her husband and his family would mean facing potential deportation back to a family who wanted her to remain with her husband irrespective of the everyday violence she was enduring.

The fear of return compounded, and FN thought she would likely face a similar violence if she returned home for leaving both her husband and London, a place that holds a promise for a better life that her family worked hard to provide. This in itself is a result of the complicated relationship of colonial history where migration (from rural areas to a neighbouring city, from smaller cities to larger capitals and beyond borders) has also been shaped by capitalism – believing greater opportunities lie elsewhere, often because they do. Importantly, there is also hope of remittances – 'where money is sent back to families from workers in Britain, North America, the Middle east and elsewhere' which shows the impact of global capital that has 'reshaped patriarchal power in many parts of South Asia' (15, ibid). This shame is also a 'trace of disavowed class anxiety, the darker side of aspiration's optimism' felt by FN's family (Berlant, 2011). FN believes this must be why they don't want her to return home – she's made it to London and should stay to help her family by performing her labour to her husband and his family. FN's story becomes a place of departure for other participants to share how similar and known her experience is to their own. "We are scared of the police - for women like us, you can't be sure what the state will do," one participant added to FN's narrative.

Most participants came to the UK on dependent visas and have been subject to domestic violence like FN. 'Women like us' was a phrase that was ringing around the room – there is a conscious recognition that some services are just not for them. The 2021 Domestic Abuse Act passed in spite of calls for amendment put forward by SBS, the Latin American Women's Rights Services (LAWRS) and the End Violence Against Women coalition (EVAW) that would 'offer vital protection for migrant women'.[37] The Briefing Paper released by SBS

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[37] Dharni, K. (2023b) *The struggle continues: SBS responds to the Govt's rejection of our amendments to protect migrant women*, *Southall Black Sisters*. Available at: https://southallblacksisters.org.uk/news/the-struggle-continues-sbs-responds-to-gov-rejection-of-amendments-to-protect-migrant-women/ (Accessed: 25 October 2023).

highlights the realities of women with no recourse to public funds and the vulnerability of Black and minority ethnic women in particular who suffer disproportionately higher rates of such abuse and exploitation. With the lack of financial assistance, insecure status, welfare benefits, many women are left with a 'dangerous *choice* between staying in an abusive relationship or facing destitution, homelessness and possibly detention and deportation (with potentially fatal consequences' (SBS, 2023). As SBS states, there are many consequences to this, but importantly it creates 'impunity for perpetrators' and as Wilson suggests, 'oppressive gender relations were (therefore) implicitly accepted and women's struggles against them were defined as 'part of' South Asian culture.

Wilson maps the phase of post-colonial migration from the 1960s and 70s where the state attempted to 'assimilate' immigrants. Assimilation here means a controlled 'dilution' of the migrating population, dispersing them amongst several neighbourhoods so that one area was not overcrowded with migrants, or in other words, places could remain predominantly white. 'In response, the largely working-class South Asian and African-Caribbean communities - at that time sharing a united political identity as black people - fought back, demanding basic justice in the face of racism, and cultural recognition' (Wilson, 2006). The response to cultural recognition was enforcing a kind of multiculturalism, where the state 'recognised ethnic cultures', however, this 'denied internal differentiations of gender, class, and caste' (ibid). Wilson demonstrates how what was understood as ethnic differences was a way for the British state to structure the South Asian community as 'male and conservative', allowing for the seemingly homogeneous group of 'minorities' to be controlled. Wilson describes the manner in which the state could claim to be 'multiculturally sensitive', while it also practised control – 'social workers often urged women seeking to leave violent marriages to think about the extended family and family honour, or ask themselves, 'Who will marry my daughters if I do this?' (Wilson 1989 cited in Wilson, 2006). As the participant shared, 'you can't be sure what the state will do', is part of the gamble of having to rely on the state in the first place.

Wilson draws upon examples of various policies to further the point that the British state tries to 'manage, rather than challenge, patriarchal violence, keeping it within what it sees as 'acceptable' levels' (Wilson, 2006). Using the examples of the Two-Year Rule of 1971, spouses migrating to the UK to live with their partners needed to prove that their marriage was not for the purpose of settling in the UK – reinforcing their belonging to the state was established and maintained through their relationship. Additionally, a probationary period of one-year meant they must remain in the marriage otherwise face deportation. The Labour party, assuming power in 1997, eventually repealed this law but the probationary period was still in effect. Through the efforts of organisations like SBS, such immigration and marriage laws have been modified. For example, the state sought to prevent forced marriage of British women through the Forced Marriage initiative of 2000. However, this initiative was clear in who constructed as 'British', as its main concern being the protection of British Asian women from South Asian men. Wilson challenges the 'belonging' of British Asian women here by claiming this citizenship is 'moulded to fit in with a racist conceptualisation of nation and culture (ibid). Belonging, therefore, is about who can claim to be 'British' as deemed

acceptable by the state. British-born Asian women are higher on the hierarchy than the 'other' migrant, Asian women.

While this is a limited examination of UK law and how it reproduces insecurity for migrant women, what is essential to note is how such historical policies have persisted. Such adaptive laws have also prompted resistance to different struggles, as evident by the 2021 Domestic Abuse bill. As far as immigration laws go, Wilson accurately notes, 'there is, of course, as apologists for the state never fail to remind us, the right of appeal. But it is an appeals procedure where the immigration establishment itself acts as judge and jury on its own actions' (ibid). As another participant shares, 'the system is set to frustrate people. They can claim anything from a shortage of staff to losing your documents to avoid speaking to you.' However, while some women were vocal about the way institutions treat them, others were also cautious of not wanting 'to say anything negative about the Home Office…'. Those who have had pending cases with the Home Office for years had a burgeoning list of grievances, while those who migrated recently were careful to not disparage the very institution they were relying on to help them. Additionally, projects for resistance to such laws and initiatives are often underfunded, allowing for the state to remain lawfully obedient to their own uncompromising regulations. Wilson, therefore, demonstrates how so-called multicultural policies absorbed harmful patriarchal relations and were used by the state to uphold racist and gendered control.

As our conversation continued, belonging began to take on more complex meanings, especially when it came to the daily routines and how they interact more broadly with society. As such, 'belonging can describe emotional attachments to 'home' and security, it can also describe hierarchical and exclusionary relations of possession and material wealth' (Keenan, 2015). In the following section, I expand on the 'affect' that such relationships (personal, intimate, institutional, and casual) have on the participants' everyday experiences.

'Affect' of Relationships – Impasse in Space/Place

Yuval-Davis's theorises belonging by using 'social locations' to explain the relationship between identity and membership (gender, class, etc) as categories that have a 'certain positionality along an axis of power, higher or lower than other such categories' (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Such locations are complicated by intersectional and shifting natures of power, however, 'without specific social agents who construct and point to certain analytical and political features, the other members of society would not be able to identify them' (ibid). For example, the construction of categories to which these participants belong - migrants, women, South Asian, Black, are understood vis-à-vis the dominant power relations in a society and amongst such categories themselves. For example, as highlighted above, British-Asian women have different access than 'other' Asian, migrant women. The experiences of Muslim women are likely to present other challenges than nonreligious women. These categories of difference are countless and cannot be adequately accounted for in this project alone.

Similarly, the growing interest in conviviality in migration studies has to contend with how the 'other' is constructed 'vis-a-vis European white normativity' (Redclift, Rajina and Rashid, 2022). Additionally, as Keenan argues, spaces 'hold up' relations of belonging 'when wider social processes, structures and networks give them force' (Keenan, 2015). As I have explored, the racial and gendered tensions of the participants' identities contribute significantly to how their everyday lives are shaped. Michael Hardt's argument would suggest that the interaction of identity and the political, economic, and social structures have an affect on the body, but it is only when such relationships are understood that we can begin to trace how to work through struggles and towards a good life. Given the nature of the focus group, I am attempting to explore the relationships these women have with certain structural forces, but I am also observing what the space and membership of SBS offers.

I am not witnessing this meeting in its usual state, not least because of my questions, but also because this is the group's first time together post lockdown. Noticing what felt like a reunion after a time of great isolation and difficulty, the importance of this setting is clear. 'They encourage you to not feel alone. We are not victims, we are survivors, we have overcome something'. Another quickly added, 'you feel at home here, and you don't leave the meeting hungry!' There is quick consensus as many in the room nod and eat their samosas. What becomes apparent is that there is both an element of a classroom and living room here – the classroom where they develop tools of resistance, activism, of listening and relating to one another's stories, of becoming a politicised community of hope and possibility. It feels like a living room in the in-between moments, when you notice the intimacy and care they share with and for one another. Their struggles do not feel like an individual responsibility in this place, but a shared solidarity, a space for kinship of their common feelings of being out of place. It is this solidarity that also attracted some of the women to SBS as they knew friends who relied on their services. The way they organised themselves into seats next to friends revealed something about their intimate relationship within the group itself. Those from similar regions sat near one another – For example, a woman from Kashmir who has lived in the UK for 12 years sat next to and would often be translating for another Kashmiri woman who just moved to London a few months ago. Belonging remained a complex definition in our conversation – there were moments of collective, group response as 'migrant women and survivors of domestic abuse', followed by individual stories. The collective sense of belonging was directed towards their feelings towards SBS and the women that make up this group. The individual sense of belonging, however, was the recognition of a feeling of 'impasse' that persists, which raises the question – if and when does the 'impasse' end?

I want to re-emphasise how the personal is political and as Berlant posits, 'the personal is generic'. However, I am cautious of homogenising these experiences as one-size-fits-all for South Asian migrant women. Instead, I am critiquing the 'external' and structural relationships that places a lot of these women in a moment of 'impasse' defined as –

> A thick moment of ongoingness… experienced in transitions and transactions. It is the name for the space where the urgencies of livelihood are worked out all over again,

without assurances of futurity, but nevertheless proceeding via durable norms of adaptation. People are destroyed in it, or discouraged by maintaining, or happily managing things, or playful and enthralled. Add to this the fading of security and upward mobility as national capitalist alibis for exploitation in the present…' (Berlant, 2011).

Using social locations, we can trace the participants' positionality but, importantly, also what their positionality affords them in moments of impasse. The space is what reinforces the hierarchies – as migrant women with precarious immigration statuses, some without their passport, their mobility is dependent and limited by their positionality. Simply put by Berlant, 'precarity is a condition of dependency' – so while belonging may have shifted from belonging 'to' an abusive family, the 'to' remains dependent on the state and other such structural relationships. As Keenan suggests, 'the world is a space where things, including bodies, belong in particular places, and that belonging affects what those things can do' (Keenan, 2015). Keenan provides Sara Ahmed's example of an academic setting when a white person walks into a meeting, 'the space is already oriented around her. The space is ready to hold her up - to physically and socially support her relation of belonging in the meeting' (ibid). Keenan uses this point to suggest that the 'longer I stay there, the more firmly the space becomes shaped towards me' (ibid) or when being dwelling in an impasse 'one keeps moving, but one moves paradoxically, in the same space' (Berlant, 2011). Keenan emphasises the 'repetition, the habit, the accumulation of gestures that shapes the space' (Keenan, 2015). It is the combination of positionality, the space that is afforded to the participants, and the repetition that accounts for the loss of a sense of belonging for women who have lived in London longer – the exact reason why women who have been living in the UK for a while were able to list their grievances with the Home Office. I will expand on this idea of time and belonging in the upcoming section.

Berlant focuses her analysis of precarity in the political and economic but demonstrates how the 'neoliberal feedback loop' shapes 'the experience of insecurity throughout the class structure and across the globe' (Berlant, 2011). This feedback loop is crucial in understanding the struggle towards belonging. A participant, SH, who has lived in London for 20 years shared her experience of first moving to London and the following years of attempts to make the city home. Having escaped an abusive environment, she sought out SBS who supported her through securing housing and participating in such monthly meetings. Through her encounter with SBS, she met and made friends with women and began finding moments of security in her everyday routine. SH has a chronic medical condition and was on a waiting list to be seen by specialists at the NHS. As time went on, her frustration grew as her mobility and access remained limited. She wasn't able to secure appointments with the doctor. The Home Office still has her passport. Although she is a trained professional, without the right paperwork, she can't seek employment and therefore unable to afford anything but the necessities.

With the lack of economic access, even travelling between neighbourhoods to supermarkets carrying home food she is familiar with and nostalgic for is a struggle. 'I no longer feel like I

belong'. Her positionality affects the space she has access to – a house but separate from a community. Funds – but limited to everyday essentials. The space to which she belongs exists within boundaries that are legal, political, social, cultural, and they are repeated actions that have consequences to her belonging. 'Indeed a certain level of permanence is required for something or someone to belong… if the space only holds up the relation fleetingly, then it is more likely to be a loan than a property, because ultimately that something or someone belongs somewhere else' (Keenan, 2015). It is this 'feedback loop' that stresses SH's belonging is not a smooth fit in London. A crucial takeaway from this focus group was to recognise the shifting nature of the feeling of belonging as it related to the hierarchical and power relationships that influence the daily lives of these women. It is with time that these encounters revealed the structural nature of exclusion because it is multifaceted and complex. Crucially, belonging appears more and more like a 'loan' than a practice or property over time.

As Nadine El-Enany argues in her book, *(B)ordering Britain,* the British immigration system reproduces the colonial and racial hierarchies (El-Enany, 2020). Such categorisation of racialised people affects their access to necessary resources such as healthcare and housing. For the participants of the focus group, women who migrated recently attached their belonging to the sense of safety felt in the absence of domestic violence. Whereas women who have lived in London for years described their belonging as being at odds with the city, the government, and the 'British' community. It emphasises that their belonging is elsewhere, however, for the participants, 'elsewhere' has been a place of violence in their homes. Therefore, the longing for belonging perseveres, even when its 'cruelty' as Berlant would suggest is recognised.

What is the feedback loop of an impasse and do people in such precarious situations ever recover from it? Berlant suggests the rhetorical question of 'where is your place' becomes a genuine concern in moments of impasse – or when belonging is under threat and therefore politicised. The impasse is a longue durée, or a historical present in which, as Berlant argues, the promise of a good life is exposed for the precarity that is part of the process – of longing to belong. Their argument traces the neoliberal and capitalist structures of everyday life, which are vital and relevant, but my inquiry and intervention is more aligned with the overall 'affect' and the ambivalence that challenge a sense of belonging – of moving in the same space, 'in the unbound temporality of the stretch of time' (Berlant, 2011). Berlant and Hardt would argue that this space and awareness of the affect it has on a body also grants time to develop detachment, as SH eventually does. In the examples mentioned above, FN and SH's time spent living in London varies considerably. The affective relationships they have is a combination of unkind interactions that are intimate (within FN's family) and public (SH's experience with institutions). Their belonging *to* a family or to the state, therefore, can remain precarious. In the next section, I reflect on time as a means to assess belonging – how do FN and SH on opposite ends of the time in the UK spectrum – make sense of their belonging to a community and to the UK?

Time, Community and Belonging

Time 'plays a complicated and wide-ranging role in the social processes of belonging and interconnection. Time is implicated in social methods of inclusion and exclusion, as well as understandings of legitimacy, agency and social change' (Bastian, 2014). Many stories of the migrant community are understood by exploring experiences of the past – what was their life like 'back home'. There is a clear temporal significance, as relayed in the participants' ethnographic narratives dealing with nostalgia, which is recalling memories of the past in a specific way – for example, the positive associations to one's ancestral home or the feeling of domestic and gendered responsibilities. Belonging becomes about a reflexive remembrance of moments in which one has felt inclusion or exclusion – but these memories are not fully investigated as a function of time. As Michelle Bastian found in her study of time and community, the past is not something that is over nor the future simply something that is yet to have occurred (ibid).

The formation of Southall as a South Asian community shows the importance of time in how such places are constructed through experiences and moments of migration, conflict, exclusion and inclusion over time. As explored previously, the spatial and temporal significance of Southall is, in part, informed by the boundaries maintained between and by communities elsewhere. Even in my earlier description of the fluxes of migration, I presented a brief, yet linear model of time, utilising moments of history that have shaped the community, seemingly chronologically. As argued, the shorthand of 'community' suggests a homogenous and static formation of a group – in this instance, a diaspora of South Asians – which does not account for the dynamic, varied, and conflicted makeup of a community – religion, sexuality, and other identities impact people within the community differently. Therefore, 'if (a) community isn't static then neither are understandings or experiences of time… where time is not a stable background to a community but is itself changeable and historical' (ibid).

History can be seen as 'changing' by recognising and recovering either invisiblised or lesser-known stories of what and who did not fit (or challenged) the dominant narrative. For example, oral histories are becoming a bigger part of families and diasporic narratives where second-generation diasporas understand the experiences of Partition as covered by Kavita Puri's book, *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories.* History is also not fixed to a certain time in the sense that the struggles of the past are not simply left in the past as seen in the 2022 Leicester unrest where British-Pakistani Muslims and British-Indian Hindus saw escalated violence, some of which has been attributed to the growing religious tensions led by Modi's Hindu nationalist administration in India. The 'collective' belonging of a community and the 'individual' belonging of a person follow a similar erratic expression of time in that it is contingent upon the context – of recalling memories, of present experiences, or of future concerns and anxieties – for example, in the case of the focus group, of what might become of their legal appeals.

When designing the research, I was tempted to structure the project by generation – surely the experience of belonging is dependent on some understanding of time. The access to cultural commodities, the experience of racism as first-generation immigrants versus the changing racism of today – there are significant shifts and changing dialogues in the socio-political climate that directly impacts belonging. While this research is certainly about differences, it is not about comparisons of generation or time. As my research progressed, there was a conscious decision to avoid commenting on generational belonging as a major factor of assessing time, community, and belonging. The reason being a very logistical one from which came a rather compelling analysis. Given the timing of this project, the capacity of recruitment became limited to an issue of access – both online and in-person encounters. SBS and approaching chefs was a starting point of this research, given the political solidarity that SBS espouses and the pivotal role of food in the lives of women in the restaurant industry. While there are several projects that focus on the specific experiences of first-generation migrants, or second-generation diasporas, what became clear is there is not always a neat break between generations and their experience of belonging given that time, as emphasised, does not function in a relatively 'neat' way. While generational difference can be a denomination from which to carry out research, the subjective and individual narratives show the heterogeneity of how belonging changes, adapts, and can be studied within a given context. Through this research, the focus on differences became an organic and fruitful way to explore what belonging means to the individuals in this project.

Belonging over Time

I dwell on the non-linear experience of time to put forward one of the major takeaways from my conversations with the women in the SBS focus group. If time is not a neat expression of moments, experienced chronologically, nor are the communities static, neither can the feelings of belonging be charted along the length of time spent in a community, city, or country. I began the interview with a simple question - how long have you been living in London? The group took turns to answer my question, '12 years, 8 months, 1 month, 4 years…', until one woman added 'hardest' in front of the two years she has lived in London. This participant broke from the norm where, generally, earlier migration for most participants was met with hope, a potential for a good life.

As I stated earlier, belonging was first understood as a safety – while I do not go into much detail, it is not to dismiss nor overlook the experience these participants endured to remove themselves from physical and emotional violence. The 'promise' of a good life was something to look forward to having secured a greater sense of safety and autonomy. However, as I outline in the earlier section, the removal of their intimate relationship then challenged the relationship they could afford with the state, constricting the space of their mobility. Still, during the first few years, such space felt durable – many of the participants who had lived in London for less than a year, simply said 'I am happier'. While there is an obvious moment of impasse or transition, the beginning of this period feels optimistic, because in the present, there is an absence of immediate violence, and the future feels hopeful – because, as Ahmed would argue, is a 'promise', of 'deferred possibility' (Schaefer, 2014).

Yet, for those who have been living in London for years, the promise remains indefinitely deferred.

Why is that the desire of belonging perseveres even when, as SH described in her everyday experience, the reciprocity of the Home Office is minimal or overall lacking? Berlant offers a few explanations – most importantly, 'life organising can trump interfering with the damage it provokes' (Berlant, 2011). By 'life organising', I am inferring that the tremendous task of piecing a life together after escaping a violent 'home' requires access to funds and support. 'Here, home is indeed elsewhere, but it is also where the self is going; home becomes the impossibility and necessity of the subject's future (one never gets there but it is always getting there), rather than the past which binds the self to a given place' (Ahmed, 1999). As Ahmed writes, the 'security of destination' takes on another powerful meaning for women who are finding safety in a new home. However, not only are there legal repercussions, but as covered, additional gendered and racial biases that work against many women in a similar position to SH. Nonetheless, the struggle against authorities may lead to an appeal or, eventually, the right to remain. As is the case for FN, there is no 'choice' as such whether to remain in the UK or return to her family, where she would be blamed for bringing dishonour and shame. The attempt to organise one's life, free of violence is an ambition that perseveres. The struggle is also expected – the route to the UK is not simple and costly – for FN, the desire to stay in the country was compounded by an already difficult migration.

> All these modes of orientation and having a feeling about it confirm our attachment to the system and thereby confirm the system and legitimacy of the affects that make one feel bound to it, even if the manifest content of the binding has the negative force of cynicism or the dark attenuation of political depression (Berlant, 2011).

The system is what holds the authority to grant freedoms, so it is within the system that FN and SH must make their case, 'audition' for their rights. As Wilson puts it, 'struggles are essentially about negotiating rights from the state', where in the process the state is legitimised in their resolve, and the advocacy work that is done by organisations like SBS, also must centre the task of appeals to the state within the framework they have organised. The state, therefore, is the authority figure that offers proximity to the 'good life'.

Hannana Siddiqui, Head of Policy and Research for SBS, in her interview with Wilson, makes a clear distinction between their campaigning and their political efforts. 'I do not want the government to fund our political work but they can fund core services' (Wilson, 2006). The 'split' of expectation and demand is what sustains their work – they can continue to call out the government's treatment of migrant women, while expecting their services to receive the necessary funding. In Siddiqui's view, SBS works within the given system of state to some extent. Berlant considers this 'split' of optimism a useful mechanism with which detachment from cruel projects can begin. It is this 'split' that I consider to be the work of ambivalence. Ambivalence is a position from which to work through the optimisms and depressions of belonging – of detaching from belonging to the UK and fostering an optimism

of belonging to solidarity networks like SBS, to forming affective communities of friends and families.

As I argue in Chapter 3, belonging can be a practice that is expressed in moments or in specific places. It is a recognition of which attachments are cruel, and which are empowering. SBS becomes a space that condenses a mixture of anxiety and hope, where participants belong with one another, and experience a unique passage of time, in an intimate public sphere –

> An intimate public is more specific. In an intimate public one senses that matters of survival are at stake and that collective mediation through narration and audition might provide some routes out of the impasse and the struggle of the present, or at least some sense that there would be recognition were the participants in the room together (Berlant, 2011).

The decision – even if not really a choice as such – of being present and part of SBS may in itself be considered a 'desire for the political' – what each participant puts into and gets out of these meetings is different and unique to each individual and while it is a routine, I cannot assume it is always enjoyable or a positive experience. However, the space, nonetheless, is a political community. It is a space in which to practice ambivalence and negotiate with what 'the good life' means for them. It is a space that allows for them to feel comfortable with uncomfortable conversations within the doors of the auditorium, a space to practice a belonging with attachments to one another and to SBS.

The Politics of ambivalence

Clare Hemmings, examining the life and work of feminist and anarchist activist Emma Goldman, emphasises the importance of ambivalence for challenging a 'politics of certainty' (Hemmings, 2018). In her account, Hemmings suggests that exploring ambivalence can help 'foreground tensions… to import the aspects of thinking and living that most clearly fit with the (often misplaced) certainties of the present'.

> A sustained focus on ambivalence helps us to engage past politics and theory as complex or contradictory and to foreground the importance of current complexity, despite our desire to have resolved both past and present paradoxes.

Hemmings cautions the single story, the necessary work of critique, and the ways narratives become the monolithic for feminism that Goodman was critical of. I take this point to employ a similar critique of monolithic migrant experience – where I argue 'time' as a common denominator of length of stay in the UK assumes everyone may have had the same experience of migration. Ambivalence, therefore, allows for some feelings to be different, and also, to remain unresolved. Throughout the focus group, 'belonging' remained complex and without a singular definition. Sometimes seen as safety, sometimes seen as the lack of stability, and on a few occasions, the same participant claimed both to belong and to not belong depending on context. The participant, SH, who has lived here for 20 years, described

her early days as relief, then the following years as dealing with the agony of what her taking up space in the everyday meant. Her ambivalence is not conveyed through contradiction, but rather, the recognition that belonging can hold multiple meanings – it is positive and negative, hope with despair.

Ambivalence is a means to work through things – Ahmed, quotes Freud's essay, *Mourning and Melancholia,* to describe forming new attachments,

> Just as mourning impels the ego to renounce the object by declaring its death, and offers the ego the reward of staying alive, each individual battle of ambivalence loosens the fixation of the libido upon the object, by devaluing, disparaging, and so to speak, even killing it (Ahmed, 2010).

Detachment, therefore, allows for an opportunity for attachment elsewhere. Berlant argues queer phenomenology is an effort to 'create new openings for how to live, and to offer the wild living or outside belonging that already takes place as opportunities for others to re-image the practice of making and building lives. In this work social attachments are evidenced in practice, including the practices of the senses that are always working in the new and are active and responsive without being expressive, necessarily, of ideologies, or truths or anything' (Berlant, 2011). I argue the 'battle of ambivalence', and the recognition of 'new attachments', offers an explanation as to why the sense of belonging has changed over time for many of these participants. It is with time that the attachments towards 'assimilation' or belonging to the UK take on different meanings where women like SH, 'break the double-bind of cruel optimism' (ibid). The new attachments SH forms, in spaces like SBS, is a shared processing of such ambivalence where others are, in their own time, working through their ambivalences, as they orient their daily lives towards safety of belonging.

Ahmed claims happiness is not autonomous, but I believe ambivalence might be – it takes the pressure away from certifying a position, stance, or feeling and instead, allows one to feel the whole feeling, the total complexity of it – negative, positive, contradictory or not. Before the focus group, I had anticipated women that have lived in London longer to have a greater sense of belonging to the UK – an increased familiarity of places, a chance to cement a community and a routine. However, during the interview, the inverse was true for many women who detailed the ways in which they carry the burden of being a migrant in the city or feel disenchanted by the various ways the state discriminates against them. Migration is optimistic, as are all attachments. Berlant explains a sense of optimism as a 'cluster of promises' and there is an endurance that is sustained where proximity to what is desirable itself can satisfy the promise. For all participants, it was the absence of domestic violence – and the perseverance of pending Home Office cases is fed by this proximity and hope for the future.

However, in my analysis, it is not simply the feeling or a psychological state of belonging, (un)belonging, but the management of their everyday lives that feeds their ambivalence. 'There remains the question of the direction of the repair toward or away from reestablishing

a relation to the political object/scene that has structured one's relation to strangers, power, and the infrastructures of belonging' (Berlant, 2011). The 'direction' raises the question – what is it that these participants want to belong to? There is no one answer – the desires and fantasies of a good life are different depending on the participant and on any individual. I do not offer a conscience statement for what belonging means. The participants who expressed a desire for belonging did so in messy ways. The 'direction' as Berlant posits is a form of 'ambient citizenship', as 'not being worn out by politics' (ibid) and as I argue, reimagine what belonging is and can be. As I make the case in this thesis, the relationship that many migrants or those in a diaspora have with food is one way in which the participants work through negotiations, exercise solidarity, and can practice belonging. Unfortunately, my conversation with SBS was limited and we only got to discuss food for a short while.

Ambient Citizenship, Class, and Food

Berlant describes 'Ambient Citizenship' as a 'mode of belonging, really, that circulates through and around the political in formal and informal ways, with an affective, emotional, economic, and juridical force that is at once clarifying and diffuse' (Berlant, 2011). They use the sensation of sound and noise as a sensorial subversion of politics. In her example, she demonstrates the work of Cynthia Madansky's *The PSA Project*, where public service announcements, along with visuals, against the Iraq War was projected to 'reroute the audience's visceral national association' (ibid) – juxtaposing the sight and sound of nationalism to 'witness the flaws in the national symbolic', Madansky attempts to convert senses into memories and question the past actions of the American government. Berlant suggests that while the audience is presumed to be 'cosmopolitan' and likely to agree with the message, the space of this exhibition 'provided a sense for being together in the political' (ibid). Does 'ambient citizenship' describe the focus group or the other participants in this research?

While I have not discussed food in length in Part 2, I want to draw together some points as I make some conclusions on belonging. Southall Part 1 dealt with sensory, memory, and nostalgia of food, while making a case for the subversive role of food as a proxy for home but, importantly, for multiplicity of home and identity. When questioned about the routine of food, a few participants shared their frustration with how expensive home foods can be, how difficult some ingredients are to source, while others talked about how difficult it was to get their children to enjoy 'smelly South Asian food' and their desire for 'British food'.

In 2021, a group of five artists came together and organised an exhibition at the Ort Gallery in Birmingham, Recipes for Resistance. Their attempt was to bulk out the flattened narrative of South Asian identity through the singular use of 'curry' assigned to the diaspora and its food. Raju Rage, the curator, had learnt of a conspiracy where, during colonisation, the British Army and the South Asian officers were passing messages through chapatis, which while this likely an exaggerated fallacy, it inspired investigation into interesting forms of resistance. Saba Khan, an artist who contributed to this exhibition focused on the rolling pin as an act of resistance – while I'll describe the idea of repetition in the following chapter with

the chefs, I want to focus on the archetype of the South Asian woman. Khan carved the rolling pin with the image of a woman, head covered, rolling rotis as shown in the image below (Khan, 2020).

Artist Sabba Khan – 'If my rolling pin could talk'
Shared at the Recipes for Resistance exhibition at Ort Gallery, Birmingham, 24 October – 28 November 2020

Similar to Madansky's PSA Project and Bhaumik's Curry Cartography mentioned in Part 1, art becomes a powerful way to depict and challenge narratives. The participant who claimed their child avoids South Asian food, repeats the process of cooking, making rotis and accepts the underappreciated value of her labour. Food, like belonging, has multiple meanings – it can be a memory of home, but also a struggle to afford or find necessary ingredients, or a negotiation within the family of which identity they align with. The role often requires women tooffer their cultural heritage and perform their duties, however it is not always for the family but for their own pleasure – 'sometimes, I just cook for me, and I love it', shared a participant. The kitchen, as described in Chapter 2, is not simply a place of drudge and repetition, but also of individual space and, sometimes, freedom.

While I have addressed the varying degrees of backgrounds and positionalities of the participants, I do believe there is more research to be done and said about the privileged class that has greater access to food and hybridity. Some participants in this research satisfy certain conditions of belonging – visas, passports, right to remain – while others do not. These legal realities cannot be reduced nor diminished by suggesting 'hybrid' identities are easy to perform for many who are still fighting for basic freedoms and access to employment or appropriate housing. So, an 'ambient citizenship' may refer to the participants of this research but is likely to be observed differently. My understanding of ambient citizenship is to disengage, to whatever extent it is likely, with the normative politics of belonging and

establish networks of solidarity elsewhere – for this focus group, the ambivalence is heightened by the desire for legal and political recognition, but their belonging is practised through SBS and like organisations. It is a practice of setting up a counter-space of belonging.

As Mariana Ortega rightly points out, 'multiplicity is more at issue for some selves than others, depending on the different ways in which their positionalities are perceived or negotiated given specific social, economic, and cultural contexts as well as power relations' (Ortega, 2014). Bordering realities also privileges certain people who are more easily able to cross borders, and for whom, including people like me, hybridity is seen as a productive exploration of one's identity to challenge the everyday 'givens' of life – I am writing a PhD on this subject with privilege and access to funds and a student visa. As such, I do not want to conflate people's sense of belonging through food as being simply an act of subversion or defiance by withdrawing from a normative sense of 'assimilation' and eating home foods. However, there is something meaningful to take away in the acts of internal dissent. In the prioritising of ambivalence, and the sense of belonging, however it is defined, to be experienced through our senses and in places where belonging can be practiced. Southall takes space and forms a diasporic home through the sensations of sight, sound, smell, taste. Participating in SBS takes space and forms a solidarity and belonging through sharing stories, snacks, and importantly, being together as a political community. This political community isn't the national imaginary of membership through citizenship, but rather a political community that finds resilience from the margins as hooks would suggest.

I have detailed the ambivalence of diaspora, colonised and the coloniser, of gendered labour and food, as something to work through. While 'impasse' may suggest gridlock, impasse, as Berlant and Hardt would argue, also has potential for change to a status quo. To dwell on such experiences that may be formal, informal, feel political or apolitical is to have space and the opportunity to work through them. Berlant argues for new forms and 'idioms of the political, and of belonging itself, which requires debating what the baselines of survival should be in the near future, which is, now, the future we are making' (Berlant, 2011). They think of 'the middle' of an impasse as a place from where detachment can begin. In the focus group, this detachment came with time, but with the recognition that some attachments - such as attachment to polity - persevere as the few means of accessing rights. However, the way the participants eventually articulated their belonging was through emotional attachments and moments that happened beyond their tenuous relationship with the state or Home Office.

'Being political together' may seem like a neat or simplified summary of what this group represents. However, it is not without ambivalence that the participants of the focus group describe, feel, and make sense of their belonging. Given the security and sensitivity of the focus group meeting, I was not able to spend much time with them, nor request one-on-one interviews. There are many questions left unanswered and responses I could not explore in greater depth – especially to better understand the role of food in their everyday lives. Being with the group, however, clarified the complexity of belonging, even if it has raised more points of inquiry. The women in this group continue to struggle against oppression, fair

representation, patriarchal violence, but do not represent a monolithic group without agency or fight. Demands of the state, even with partially met with limited financial support, means that the framework of the system persists. That is to say, women are, as a participant described it, 'in a constant state of limbo', waiting for more access to be granted. Organising as they have and continue to, along with the aid of SBS, is a form of dissent, a form of ambient citizenship, and a declaration of their ambivalence towards what safety feels like and what stability they are made to long for.

5 Eating with 'Professionals'

While the previous chapter dealt with the concepts of ambivalence and cruel optimism in the politics of belonging, chapter 5 recentres food to further ambivalence in the conversation of belonging. This chapter analyses the everyday lives of two chefs working in London. These women speak candidly about their experience in the food industry, setting up their business, the importance of storytelling through food and the impact it has on their sense of belonging. My interview with Chef A, in departure from the other interviews, took place over Zoom. The chef was promoting a cookbook that is indicative of the restaurant and meals she labours over – a recollection of family history and nostalgia of home. The second interview took place at a restaurant frequently ordered from by chef B. She is a business owner that organises pop-ups, supper clubs, and catering events, with an explicit focus on storytelling.

As chefs, both participants are uniquely positioned to offer their insight for this research. First and foremost, their relationship with food is not only a guarantee, given their effort to be vocal participants in the food industry, but also central to their livelihood. As women belonging to the South Asian diaspora, who cook South Asian food, this chapter benefits from the experiences of those who are intimately involved in the dialogue and questions posed in this research. As I've written elsewhere, there is significant ambivalence in the relationship women have with food – the gendered responsibility and labour, mostly unpaid, in domestic South Asian homes. However, for both chefs, this labour is their also employment. The kitchen presents 'contradictory emotions of excitement, unease, and hesitation' (Scicluna, 2017). This domestic space becomes a semi-private/public space in a professional kitchen from which both the chefs challenge the gendered and cultural expectations around food, hospitality, and care.

 The chef's food comes with a mission statement – to unpack history, share meals that emphasise not only the food itself but the stories that occur around the preparation and consumption of food. They, therefore, are vocal representatives of reclaiming food as more than a banal daily activity and insert themselves and the people who cook and serve alongside them, into every dinner, supper club or event. As female chefs of the South Asian diaspora, they are also vocal in a way challenges the gendered roles within their community, but this is not without their own contradictions as I learn throughout the interviews. These two participants, similar to others, oscillate between their interpretations of belonging, identity, and their place, but also what their position of authority in the world of food means for their business and how they choose to represent themselves publicly. It is a reflection of the multilayered meanings and experiences that are complex, without a fixed response, but context and situation dependent.

In the following two chapters, chef A and B reflect on and address the tensions put forward in this research. This chapter is thematically divided into two sections – Heritage and Authenticity, and The Role of Commensality, Gender, and Place-making. These sections influence and interact with one another, and the purpose of their separation is, in the first instance, to provide structure to the chapter. I also want to highlight the importance of the

recurring themes of ambivalence as I make connections to further how food reimagines a counter-space of belonging. The chefs meditate on South Asian cuisine in the UK – the homogenisation, growing emphasis on regionality, and the control of what can be authentically called 'South Asian' – both food and by extension, the South Asian identity. Asma and Numra discuss their food business, what authenticity means, who can claim authority over the determining factors that makes food 'authentic' and how it influences taste, aesthetic, cost, and other aspects of South Asian food in the UK.

Heritage and Authenticity

Discourse on Heritage

Common assumption is that heritage can unproblematically be identified as old, grand, monumental, aesthetically pleasing sites, buildings, places, and artefacts' (Smith, 2006). Smith understands heritage as a 'cultural practice, involved in the construction and regulation of a range of values and understandings (ibid). What it means for the chefs is the idea of practice, repetition of family recipes, or the adaptation of one, is a performance of and homage to their heritage. Smith's argument, however, traces discourse on heritage that can override alternative practices and is reliant on 'claims of technical and aesthetic experts' – the assumption that there is a 'right' way to practice heritage. Regarding food, notions of authenticity act in a similar manner, especially in the Western context of food from outside the West, i.e., South Asian food in the UK. Heritage becomes a selling point as diners begin to crave authenticity or practice their cosmopolitanism. The boundaries, Smith argues, delineates who is an expert and who isn't, and while her critique is examining the Western perspective on heritage and the elites who uphold this idea of heritage without challenge, it is useful to consider how those in a diaspora also see heritage as a tool of agency. As encountered in chapter 2, commentary on diaspora, spaces of diaspora have a danger of reproducing a similar boundary of exclusion, of equally empowering and disempowering the diasporic individual. Discussions on heritage work similarly with careful ambivalence to recognise who is empowered in the work of reproducing heritage.

While there are attempts of preservation of a past, especially as chef A and B offer their food with a story, their intention is an act of celebrating their personal histories, food, and narratives. As I demonstrate in this chapter, both chefs display their heritage as not a relic of the past or something static, but as seen through ambivalence with which they express their identity. An identity that is made up of their background, ancestry, surroundings, labour, their creativity and more. For the chefs, food enables the workings of history, memory, nostalgia, while paying attention to the inequalities that contribute to their heritage – with recognition of invisiblised stories of history, place, gender, and labour. For chef B, it is an opportunity to engage with her family's hometown in Pakistan and South Asia by focusing on specific elements – be that clay as a tool in cooking (something I discuss later in the chapter) or what seasonality means in the Pakistani context. For chef A, it is a declaration that her food cannot be consumed without understanding its context of Bengal and India more broadly. Both are adamant that food is not a temporary invitation for acceptance of difference, but rather of

making space to continue the dialogue of ambivalence, celebration, and critique. In doing so, the reflexive act of performing heritage also creates heritage – meaning there is a sense of continuation to the cultural significance of their food history. The food of Lahore or Karachi and the food of Bengal becomes part of their London lives and is constantly being revised through their new interpretations. The construction of heritage, therefore, is an ongoing process which challenges the assumption that heritage is of a strict past. As I argue in the previous chapter, time and history are not necessarily linear but are being revisited and reinterpreted. In fact, through the food and stories that these chefs share, their respective heritage is a contemporary and living part of their everyday routines.

<u>Locating Food – Where is Home?</u>

To emphasise the complexity of narratives shared by the participants, it is important to highlight, once again, the role of difference in this research. Both chefs have a crucial different starting point – chef A migrated to the UK as an adult and chef B was born in London with a greater ability to move between the UK and Lahore. Their relationship with nationality, heritage, belonging and the role of food is unique to their background. Yet, as I endeavour to show in this section, however different their food beginnings, both have arrived with one major similar motivation as chefs – to tell stories.

I met chef B at Charsi Karahi in Norbury, the first and only interview to take place in South London, where she grew up. She had just returned from catering a wedding in Wales and was quick to show me pictures of her take on a curried devilled egg – a pink hue on the generally white egg, with a vibrant turmeric yellow curried yolk. Our conversation is food driven from the get-go and it is clear this is how chef B's identity is communicated. Through an example of spatchcock cooking a chicken, she claims 'having those elements that make me a London chef (the method) with Desi flavours' is important to tell her story. Cooking techniques such as brining, are 'not the most traditional in desi cooking, which seems to be cooking fast or for a long time', but a signature to updating the dishes chef B loves to make. Heritage and authenticity are among the crucial factors that shape the initial discussion on food. Her take on the methods employed by her mother or grandmother is a reflection of how they grew up in Pakistan. 'Anything there that was perishable, those didn't last very long, and you can see how the temperature and climate of the country matters, of the resources available to you, too'.

Chef B was born in London and lived around South London before moving to Pakistan to complete her A-Levels. Living between the two places, food was an obvious distinguishing marker of their day-to-day life. She has a vivid memory of finding her mum's 'English' cookbook, only for the back of it to be covered with handwritten Desi recipes. Having spent significant time in both the UK and Pakistan, 'home' food in London and in Pakistan seemed to switch to whatever culture they were missing. 'While I do have memories of my nan watching Jerry Springer, eating a cheese and pickle sandwich or fish fingers in a pita, our home food (in London) was predominantly Desi'. In Pakistan, however, the family would often feel nostalgic for 'English' food. 'Our home food in Pakistan changed, and our mum would make homemade pizza, lasagne, *spag bol* – but with the addition of a half-boiled egg,

and sweet and sour chicken with coleslaw'. The last two dishes, chef B adds, make no sense but were often part of their home diet where 'home food became recreating a home you've left'. Her parents made an effort, stemming from the anxiety of losing what it would mean to feel British, to bring boxes of biscuits from the UK, or even go as far as 'leaving BBC news on in the background so we didn't lose our accents'.

Chef A was born in Calcutta, India and moved to the UK in 1991 after marriage when she was 22 years old. Initially settling in Cambridge, she is earnest about the difficulty adjusting to the UK. She remembers writing letters to her parents, feeling isolated from her family and struggling to make her new place feel like home. Similar to cookbook author Madhur Jaffrey who only came to learn cooking once she left India, chef A never cooked until she moved to the UK. This was mostly because she was never meant to learn – instead, she was expected to marry 'some prince charming'. On one of her routine lonely walks, it was only until she smelled parathas and ghee from someone's kitchen that she felt the UK could be like home. The aroma of familiar food relaxed her senses and made the walk a little less lonely. It was a 'condition of becoming diasporic' that instigated an 'affective longing for Indian-coded comestibles' (Mannur, 2009) – although, for chef A, these weren't consciously a longing, until she made food a practice of placemaking. She also describes this as the lowest point in her life and from there, she made an active decision to use food to 'liberate herself'. Having removed herself from the physical borders of India and becoming diasporic left the chef battling an almost existential loss of place and politicising a seemingly domestic practice (Scicluna, 2017). The importance of which, as a business owner, takes a more central role in her daily life. It is no surprise that the way she communicates her sense of purpose and belonging is through food. However, this also means there is a certain 'business' tone to how she conveys her story throughout the interview.

Eventually becoming a way to deal with her homesickness, cooking food from her home was made more meaningful as her mum owned a catering business and eventually taught her to cook on chef A's trips back to India. The process of learning to cook Indian food in the UK did not simply adhere to a gendered chore or a domestic burden for the chef, as its intention was fulfilling a sense of home. While chef A alludes to her class growing up in India, her experience immediately sets her apart from others such as KY, as referenced in Research Story, who talks of women in the kitchen as a consistent state of their everyday labour. The gendered domestic burden fell outside of chef A's upbringing. However, she does clarify that no woman in her family had ever worked before her mum nor, as she shares, had her mum attended university. Yet, she began a cooking empire that would later include her daughter. Food was featured heavily in her life growing up, but cooking would only later serve as a proxy to feel closer to her mum while living abroad. This very relationship is what inspired her cookbooks and restaurant which is more than just about the food itself but the stories of her mum who, as chef A explains, 'spoke the language of an emancipated woman'. It is also the reason chef A prefers to work with women in the kitchen, many who are not classically trained chefs. To fill out her cookbook of memories and recipes, chef A shares the frequent back and forth with her mum,

'I asked her how much of something she puts in a dish, and she said, 'I put 1 cup' and when I put 1 cup, it burnt. I then check with her, and she says, yes 1 cup and shows me this yellow cup, which is basically like a bucket or a jug. Even now I get tripped up because she is so random! I was recently in Calcutta filming something and we needed a recipe for the last day of shoot. My mum dictates the recipe to my father because she refuses to text me and the recipe was literally 'chicken, *lassan* (garlic), *haldi* (turmeric), and *mirch* (chillies)'. That's it. It was so classic, just no steps, no amount. I remember watching her and this is how she cooks; she randomly puts together some ingredients and some ingredients she omits.'

Similar to chef B, chef A's food today is a map of her background. Coming from a background of 'impoverished aristocrats' as her father likes to call them, chef A's cooking pays homage to her roots, her life in Calcutta, and royal dishes from both her maternal and paternal side. Her father's family is from Aligarh, a wheat-growing area, which meant roti would be preferred in their daily diet whereas the chef's mother's family hails from Jalpaiguri, which meant rice was consumed for both lunch and dinner. The table growing up, therefore, was a culmination of all these food traditions, especially the Bihari Muslim food from her mum's catering business. In my conversation with the chefs, it is evident that food plays a vital and intimate role in establishing and performing certain relationships. For chef A, the food fosters a relationship with her mum, with the women who make up her kitchen, and at broad, has helped heal her relationship in London. For chef B, food allows her to trace her family heritage and through that, her individual identity. For both, heritage is situated within a familial context.

Chef B's experience of food duplicates the sense of rupture in home and heritage. 'Both places, we had an imagined home. Over here (London), my parents and grandparents had preserved an imagined Pakistan in a certain time and era, and at times a conservative space.' She feels that her and her siblings had a more flexible relationship that allowed them to internalise and navigate the two cultures in a way that their grandparents and parents could not afford to. 'Wherever we were, we had access to British culture and the world – we could listen to Hanson or Backstreet boys, fast food chains like McDonalds opened in Pakistan when we were living there – and for our parents, their world was a lot smaller when they moved to the UK'. For the older generations in the family, both places became 'romanticised, especially when you are not immediately experiencing it'. This was especially true for the ways in which the nation could delight or frustrate everyday experiences. The chef recounts times in which her family will routinely claim, 'in our culture, we don't do this' while in the UK and while in Pakistan, the UK is in favour with comments such as 'Oh, in England, there is no corruption, everyone is equal' are proudly uttered. She then makes a suggestive face of how untrue that statement is, as if words were unnecessary to explain why and the gesture alone is how she shares her feelings.

Chef A's love of food became a specific ode to nostalgia and longing for comfort whilst in the UK. There is a clear distinction to chef B's experience compared to chef A's based on the time and family to which they belong. As chef A confirms, 'there is a difference between

those born here, those of us who came in the 90s versus those who are coming now. There is a clearer idea of migration now in that people understand what they are doing in the UK versus when I arrived in the 90'. Chef B's sense of rupture probably feels familiar to that of chef B's parents and grandparents, where the separation of their worlds was drastic, more defined, and the borders felt more exact. Chef A continues, 'today, sitting in Gurgaon or deep in Western UP, you can use Google Maps and know where you are going to be in London'. She is quick to also point out two major points of consideration – the issue of class and the role of food as it correlates to the reproduction of home, especially in that time.

> 'There is also a huge difference between women coming from rural parts of India, even those who are middle class there aren't middle class here and technology in those days is different to how we have technology now. Stuff would be so intimidating, communicating with banks, using ATM's, going to supermarkets, stuff that is routine now was very difficult then.'

While chef A makes this distinction, she does not describe her own experience as such. Instead, she deflects to comment on the women she would eventually hire to staff her kitchen. The next section will delve more into her class distinctions amongst her staff. For now, she chooses to share an example of a pleasant difference between life in India and the UK through her favourite food, peas. In India, peas used to be a hardworking vegetable to enjoy because you have to de-shell peas, and it becomes a process of labour. When she realised you could get frozen peas in supermarkets in the UK, making peas in various recipes was suddenly a luxury of everyday indulgence. While some substitutions were met with joy, others were a reminder of distance. 'I am from Calcutta; we love our supari and namkeen – things you could not get them, and I would carry them with me in the early years when I first moved. Now you can get them online!' Another big difference that is important for the chef to note is how different obtaining paperwork, particularly obtaining the indefinite Leave to Remain, is from today's visa process – at least for South Asians, although she does not go into detail on how this affected her. However, she does assert that having the right to live in the country didn't translate to a sense of belonging.

During the time of chef A's initial arrival to the UK, everyday life was riddled with aspects of what eventually became formalised as the Hostile Environment under Theresa May in 2012. Prior to this as a legitimated government policy, several others were in place to make the lives of South Asian women particularly precarious. As covered in the previous chapter, the Two-Year Rule which was 'The British government's policy of sending women from South Asia who are foreign nationals back 'home' when their marriages to men settled in Britain break down within two years of arrival in Britain' (Wilson, 2006). Not only are there deep-rooted concerns of how immigration policy is enacted and what it means for migrant women, it reinforces a patriarchal norm of women belonging to men, that their admittance to the UK is only contingent upon the relationship with a man. Other instances of everyday assimilation saw the erasure of South Asian culture, languages, a concentrated effort of keeping certain neighbourhoods and schools white, all which naturally further complicated what it would mean to belong to a place.

Chef A was learning of what it meant to be part of this diaspora, especially as she grew closer to the women who were directly experiencing such mistreatment by the state more than she was – a system of hostility that not only challenges but purposefully prevents migrants from belonging to the country they now reside. Wilson further suggests the eventual adoption of 'multicultural policies claimed to recognise 'ethnic' cultures but what was projected as culture was not the dynamic ever-changing reality of our lives but something static and unchanging' (ibid). This meant harmful gendered power hierarchies within South Asian culture could go on unchallenged, and, again, has confusing ramifications for what belonging means. For chef A, arriving in 1991, policies past, present, and the constantly evolving rules became part of the South Asian struggle, and part of her resistance to the UK.

While these short descriptions of everyday struggle hardly paint the full picture of what life has been like for migrants' settling in the UK, it is important for chef A to mention how different life was – consistent with what has been established in Chapter 2belonging to the diaspora is not just an individual condition. However, it is the chef's individual connection and identification with the diaspora that she articulates the history of South Asians in the UK as part of her story. This is when heritage, belonging, and gender go beyond the familial context to the community in which she now associates herself with as a diasporic South Asian. It is necessary to account for these challenges because they have left a mark on the way she experiences home in the UK, the women who work in her kitchen and, as the following sections will demonstrate, her investment and belonging lies in food in London, not necessarily belonging to the nation.

The insecurities of visas were, fortunately, not an immediate concern for chef B but for her family while they initially settled into the country. Her individual experience of othering is not without recognition of her family's struggles of life in the UK. The dynamic experience of having lived in two distinct cultures has shaped her sense of identity, which she displays in her food and through her supper club. She mediates on what the experience means before talking more in-depth about how it imprints on her style of cooking. 'As a third-culture kid, I can pick and choose the best bits of my culture and at times, you can be torn and question where you belong. You're not from here nor there – to translate, *idhir ke bhi nahin, udhur ke bhi nahin*.' As such, chef B feels torn between two places but now is hyper-aware of the everyday manifestation of feeling othered.

> 'At this wedding over the weekend, after we did the food service, we were invited to join the party and I realised I was the only person of colour – I was quite aware of it. No one had to say or do anything, it just existed. I was wearing these two bangles that were quite colourful, visibly, you know, Asian. Two friends said they loved my bangles and the rest of me was wearing just a 'normal dress' and I just thought, why did they point that out? It reminded me of a time when I was dating this guy and I met his friends with one of my friends who later asked if I realised all his friends were white – which I didn't until she pointed it out. Sometimes I feel like we've been othered for a while that those moments stick to us.'

Chef B's acute awareness of being in a predominantly white space was informed by a previous experience and eventually, these mundane and routine situations of othering accumulate and cause her to feel suspicious of her surroundings, even if that is not the intention. The moments that 'stick' are just as much part of her heritage and the inexplicable way in which it is linked to historical and intergenerational trauma. As Sara Ahmed calls it, the 'melancholic migrant' who refuses to make light of racism, even if the experience of racism is in the past (Ahmed, 2010). The distance of a racist encounter to one's current experience doesn't lose meaning, as the chef explains. She questions how uniquely South Asian this may be, particularly in recognising its colonial history and now living in the previous empire. 'My friend was born and raised in London, and I had no idea her mum was from Ethiopia, and she would often say she knows nothing of her family history or heritage. They eat the food at home and speak the language, but her culture wasn't performed in the same way.' 'The same way' here refers to chef B's experience of South Asian culture as performed in the UK. She believes there is a 'folklore' that is attached to specifically Desi culture. 'I find it interesting how different cultures and communities perform heritage – it's nothing to do with socioeconomic status or education. It's not like the more money you have; you worry less about family history.' Chef B's personal family folklores she remembers are often told through food or family gatherings,

> 'Our family history is carried through food. If you ask my Nani (grandma) how to make pie, it would be woven into a story about how she had to borrow a *patila* (pot) from her neighbour because she didn't have one big enough and even though she didn't like the neighbour, because she was very rude, it was rare to ask for something or for her to give it. Anyway, she washed it and my uncle peed in it and then she washed it again and prayed for it (the pot) and gave it back. So, her child peed in the pot, and she never told the neighbour. Here's how I made the pie. So, the story is built into the recipe and even though she's much older and not as lucid, if I ask her that recipe, she will tell me this story again, even if I already know it.'

Chef B is very aware of how this tradition of story and recipe is carried out in the family – she does the same thing. To demonstrate, she shares the first story with specific geographic locations in London. When her grandparents left Pakistan, they moved to Balham, London, a neighbourhood of generally very few South Asian places except the one frequently visited shop called Pak Pur. Pak Pur came fully equipped with a halal butcher and was a place to buy fabrics. As she was preparing for her business, she asked her mum about a specific cut of meat, which inevitably derailed into a conversation about Pak Pur and the way her brother, when he was younger, would often unravel the fabric roll while her mum was trying to get the butcher to cut the meat the way she preferred for kebabs. Conversations with the chef are just as she describes conversations she has with her family – full of tangents with a confidence that a story cannot be told any other way, or you'll risk losing the real meaning. Similarly, chef A's cookbook is a way of cataloguing her mother's stories of Bengal in the 70s and 80s. In writing her book, she's come to recognise the way in which her mum showed her love and affection. 'When I failed an exam or my brother's team lost a cricket match, we

weren't verbally comforted, we were given biryani. That was her way of showing us love and I only recently realised that'. That history is relevant to anything she does today.

Both chef's narrative of belonging is a demonstration of what the previous chapters have established. The everyday experiences and emotional attachments are what contribute and give meaning to their lives – it is something that is always ongoing. The memories of unbelonging, therefore, are part of how they articulate when and what they belong to now. This, given the nature of their food business, is distilled through food. The chefs have arrived at a similar juncture in their food journey, even though they are beginning from drastically different places. While chef B's story is mostly linked to her family, chef A's story is, in part, shared with the women who she would eventually employ to staff her restaurant. 'Food became an important part of homecoming, and it liberated these women', she shares. While chef B's cooking is a rumination on a blending of her Pakistani and British homes, chef A claims, 'home is not this country, at all. My children will roll their eyes at me when people ask if I have family in this country and I say no. My kids apologise on my behalf and say, 'she is my mother, we are her family, and we live here'. She is quick to clarify that this country has been incredible for her because of what she has been able to achieve. Her following comment breaks the 'fourth wall' where I, as the researcher, am invited to recognise the sentiment as a South Asian woman,

> 'I say this very often and not everyone gets it, but you probably will – I could not have done this in India. I could not have created an all-female kitchen with women from different backgrounds. Half my kitchen is strict vegetarian, and my entire kitchen is Hindu. I don't even know what their caste background is, there is a mix of languages, and only with time do I learn of their history. I have a South Indian woman who works for me who moved to Bombay and has a terrible Bombay accent. Later I realised she's not actually from Bombay and over time, you discover their lives. One of their chefs, her husband, was in the Gurkhas in Hong Kong, where she lived for some time. This is a great leveller – this is what makes me proud, the restaurant and the food and being able to cook and eat together, breaking off the barriers that they had (presumably if they were in India).'

Chef A's kitchen, in part, is a challenge to the way food has been politicised, especially as of late in India, where caste and religion create powerful and violent divisions. Eating food denied by certain communities becomes criminal, especially visible in a Hindu-nationalist run government that has attempted a ban on beef with far-right groups lynching Muslim cattle farmers.[5] In addition to such heinous acts, the ban was not intended only to punish anyone who eats beef but, as the chef points out, it disproportionately impacts the poor – Dalits, lower caste communities. More broadly, 'reverting to vegetarianism, Hindu fundamentalists aim to symbolically regain an original state of purity found in ancient traditions' and making claims of who then really belongs to India (Parasecoli, 2022). As the chef suggests, she couldn't have done this in India. However, as she later admits, having a female staff or such a diverse staff wasn't the initial intention or goal. It, however,

organically grew out of hosting women who were working as domestic workers for British families.

Chef A claims to politicise her feelings – something that she has learnt to do over time, informed by her intimate relations, individual experiences, and becoming increasingly politicised while living in the UK. She is especially political in her restaurant and is known to make speeches at her supper club and dinners. She claims, 'I do not let people go. Too bad, how sad, you are a captive audience. You waited for a table and now you're going to listen to me'. These chefs are positioning food as a useful tool for their exploration of identity and belonging – again, this exploration is not something that is ever complete, but rather, a continuous process, as they look to develop new recipes or learn new stories of their families, South Asia, and beyond. Both participants rely heavily on nostalgia as it becomes a 'recourse to the past, following motivations that have to do with current conditions' (Parasecoli, 2022). These motivations have become inherently political, even if seemingly mundane. Not least because they belong to a diaspora, but also as South Asian women, which I'll expand on in future sections. In the next section, chef A and B reflect on their place within the broader South Asian culinary landscape of London. How does their contemporary take on food sit amongst the historical, social, and political makeup of restaurants, curry houses, and everyday commensality in the UK?

South Asian food in the UK – What is Authentic?

> 'All the restaurants in the UK have their place. I think curry houses are really important to our culture. These guys came here, didn't have a place to eat, and they opened them, and the food is of a different style of cooking compared to home cooking. But they have their place. Dishoom, for example, is for an English audience and not a Desi audience and I get a sense of weird nostalgia from their branding. And the food is average! But these curry houses and the role of – people put down some of these dishes now but the chicken tikka masala – we wouldn't have this amazing stuff we have now because our mind wouldn't be open to it. It has an important place still because there's a sense of something being beneath us. People are trying different techniques with desi food because of the Korma and other curries. This is what I said about my friend having a different way to experience her heritage. When I am travelling and go to Barcelona for example, which has a South Asian community – why doesn't the city reflect that in the way it does in the UK? Here, there is a vibrant South Asian cuisine, and you can get authentic food – and I am using authentic in a loose way' – Chef B

In this section, Athe chefs reflect on the more 'external' relationship of South Asian food and London. While they comment on 'British' food culture at large, unless specified, they refer to their experiences predominantly in London. As chefs in the hospitality industry, both participants have a lot to say and are vocal on the South Asian food scene in London. For chef A, it is not just about restaurants but the accessibility of celebrity chefs and media where

the likes of Madhur Jaffrey, especially in the 70s, inspired a lot of change for South Asian cuisine. She shares,

> 'I am proud of what they did. Yes, I cannot recognise a lot of the dishes and they have been adapted to fit in with what they thought the client wanted but I would not hold it against them. They were trying to run a business; they were cooking food they themselves didn't grow up eating and they were successful when no one else was. Think of the Ceviche and Sushi – they will always be overshadowed, I believe, by Indian food and it is not because of Indian food today but because of what happened in the 60s and 70s.'

Both are passionate to place curry houses in the context in which they were originally popularised. The curry house has become a monolith in itself of British cuisine, but the chefs recognise it occupies a different and equally valuable space of hybrid South Asian cooking, anglicised for survival and adaptation. It is clear these distinctions within 'authentic' South Asian cuisine is something the chefs have ruminated on, especially as they position their food within the dining scene – both offer food at a much costlier price point than the average curry house. Yet, 'the foundation was built for the love of Indian food in the curry houses – if you ignore that, if you are so arrogant to not acknowledge how tough it was. They built a business empire of curry houses', chef A says emphatically. There is also a hint of defence in her statement, especially considering the ways in curry houses have been criticised for 'tawdry décor and poor quality, inauthentic food' (Buettner, 2008) not least by white customers but also South Asians, including Jaffrey, who initially considered such restaurants as 'second-class establishments that had managed to underplay their own regional uniqueness through serving a generalised Indian food from no one area whatsoever' (Buettner, 2008) Zurina Muhammad, of the White Pube online publication, astutely points out that 'any restaurant that served actual Bengali food back then would've flopped; can you imagine tryna sell Rui Maas to a white person in the 80s?' (Muhammad, 2020). As chef A concurs, curry houses became 'vilified as coarse, lacking in nutrition, or outright disgust' (Buettner, 2008) and by extension, so were the people who are responsible for this food.

I want to highlight the role of ambivalence once again, where curry houses are positioned both as 'low quality', while also being a successful immigrant business within the UK. Both chefs refer to the popularity and likelihood of an 'Indian takeaway' in most areas, no matter how small the city or town may be, all over the UK. The chefs recognise that such places were not in a position to refuse compromise and adapted to British flavours – something they as chefs no longer have to do. The chefs think of the curry house as a symbol of survival, of financial security, of expanding the idea of British taste, but also of becoming an image of the 'other' where the food and the people are exoticised. These places became an escape from everyday 'British food', but also a site of exploitation and discrimination (Klein and Watson, 2016). Survival for these businesses meant responding to hostility with hospitality. Chef A also raises attention to the unfair ways in which people speak of the corner shops and 'the enterprising Gujrati's, this is something we don't talk about enough and it is on par with Curry houses and maybe even bigger, they have left a legacy, and we are still benefiting

from'. In chapter 2, I described ambivalence from the perspective of the diasporic individual and the 'local' which is useful to analyse this interaction of curry houses and the general non-diasporic English public. The English local views the curry house with the ambivalence of 'different' and 'exotic' but also a cheap meal. Whereas hospitality becomes a necessary performance for the diasporic restauranteur to adapt to local taste, yet it has made space for other cuisines and popularised food of the subcontinent.

Why does authenticity have a place in culinary conversations and what does authenticity of food symbolise for the consumer? How do the participants, as chefs in charge of a recipe, negotiate with what food is 'supposed' to look like or taste? Is there food for the South Asian diaspora? Chef A believes it's about defining the food you are serving as it relates to you – is it regional, is it family, is it a combination of a chef's experiences? She claims there is no generic Indian food because the context is far more personal than a singular national identity. However, there is *something* about authenticity that becomes difficult to describe for chef B. She shares an example of this tension between the throw away label and meaning of authenticity –

> 'There are certain things you can't call a dish. For example, I was making lamb Rogan Josh and it was for an English couple, but it is more a contemporary version of having a 'lamb curry'. The head chef was like 'can you make the sauce' and I said that you need to cook it with the lamb – there is no lamb Rogan Josh sauce, it needs to have lamb bones, it needs that flavour to permeate throughout the sauce. I felt strongly that you couldn't call it Rogan Josh so I called the head of the company, and I said sorry I can't put my hands on this dish, and they completely understood. There is a level of 'authenticity' and you can make something yours. That is how food evolves but there is a level of knowledge of what a dish *should* be and where it comes from and having respect for that.'

Coincidentally, while our food was being prepared, the chef, who was standing in the open kitchen near us, asked how spicy we would like the meal. Chef B responds, in Urdu, '*jita hona chahi hai, normal ho, halka nahin*' (how much it should be, normal, not light in spice), to which the chef responds, in English, 'we add spice in the end, it is not Indian food, green chillies, not powder'. She reiterates her point to demonstrate that things *can* be a certain way, as decided by the chef, which is what she was hoping to communicate to him before we had to submit to 'medium'. As Arjun Appadurai has posited, authenticity 'measures the degree to which something is more or less what it ought to be' (Appadurai cited in Buettner, 2008) but the knowledge of cuisine itself has become a marker of distinction, which he refers to as 'political economy of taste' (ibid). It is also interesting to note the distinction the chef wished to make between the cuisine he serves and the 'Indian' cuisine he assumed we were more familiar with. In this debate, who is the gatekeeper of what is 'authentic' in food, but perhaps a more interesting question is not about the authenticity itself but why authenticity is a category that we seemingly place value in? As covered in chapter 2, for cookbook authors like Madhur Jaffrey, authenticity was about an Indian identity that became more meaningful once she left India. The diasporic tension of attachment to a place and home through its

cuisine takes on new meaning when she assumed a position of authority to claim what is 'authentic'.

Chef A, likewise, thinks the conversation of authenticity has become increasingly popular as consumers are becoming more 'cosmopolitan' by way of travel.

> 'People have gone to India and Pakistan, tasted the flavour of those countries, have a greater understanding of regional food, and can tell the difference between food of Kerala and food in Delhi. If you go to Goa, food is different. The fish in Goa is different from Kerala and Bengal.'

This globalisation and expansion of travel contributes to what 'authentic' means in contemporary culinary culture. As it has become more meaningful for customers, many restaurants reflect their cuisine by claiming 'authenticity' of place, technique or indeed the cook themselves. Eating 'authentically' becomes a means for the customer to feel authentic themselves – or simply put, 'what we eat becomes us. Nothing is more straightforward, intimate, or visceral' (Parasecoli, 2022). Equally, it allows for the experience of not just 'what they eat but also of the people that produce, cook, and serve food to them' (ibid). In the case of those outside the diaspora where 'familiarity with immigrants' dishes and their practices is treated as a mark of cultural capital' (ibid). However, it is important to note this mark of distinction also comes with notions of class where the desire for local or traditional becomes a 'class-inflected resistance to mass production and homogenisation' and what is referred to as 'gastronomization of local popular cuisine' (ibid). Greater affiliation with multiculturalism and celebration of diversity contributes to this desire of authentic food, where the food can remain similarly 'exoticised'. In this search of authenticity, what it reflects on the consumer, the expectation of the chef, and what the chef is hoping to recreate of their heritage and past – all are mediated through our politics. Difference and ambivalence, again, are important qualifiers as it positions individuals and their desires to consume heritage, past, nationality through food. For chef A and B, authenticity is not a pointless conversation, yet it is an overused term that does not pay attention to what they consider is more important – the story.

Culinary Appropriation

Another important caveat in the conversation of authenticity, especially when considering cosmopolitan class consumption, is the question of appropriation. For chef A, this is a concern of 'losing authority of being feeders and healers of our cuisine'. This is reminiscent of the feminist, ambivalent struggle when it comes to food and gendered labour. Generally, 'a woman can speak with authority and be heard more easily in the kitchen because under the patriarchal division of labour this is the space in which she has the greatest authority' (Scicluna, 2017). Yet the gendered hierarchy, where men are privileged, is reinforced when chef A expresses concern about losing this authority. However, the kitchen can be the space of marginality, as hooks offers, to be a radical place of resistance. A counter-space of belonging where the perception of the kitchen isn't of burden, but of authority. Asma asks if I

speak Hindi and clarifies it's only because, despite her best efforts, her children do not, before relaying a popular Hindi saying, '*ghar ki murgha, dal barabar*'. This roughly translates to 'the chicken at home is like dal'.

> 'Chicken like dal means it's low level (at home) whereas chicken outside – it's elevated and fancy. They are not talking about chicken or dal, but the person who made it. This is the reality of it. This isn't just a saying about food but about us, about women, it is about the home cook, the woman, the mother, the sister, the daughter. This is partly where food becomes political for me.'

For the chef, appropriation is also a commentary on the value attached to the person who prepares the meal and the way power relations amongst racialised minority, and white dominant groups are reinforced through the cuisine of a marginalised group. The *murgh* has greater success or can be profitable on the 'outside' depending on who prepares it. It also raises the question of how a cuisine is valued based on the culture, 'determined not only by the gustatory traits of a speciality or by the quality of a service but also by their rootedness in identifiable communities' (Parasecoli, 2022). This is precisely why she believes diners would be happy to pay a premium price for French cuisine, because they are 'used to it' and Indian food is often relegated to 'takeaways, the cheaper the better'. As Krishnendu Ray writes, it is about the global hierarchy of taste, where certain cuisines are rated – taste and economically – above others (Ray, 2020).

> As a Muslim immigrant, I tell people who come to my restaurant that you cannot take my food and not take me. You have no right to wear my clothes, listen to my music, to copy my literature, or eat my food if you do not understand who I am. I would not let you eat my food.

Chef A sees appropriation, therefore, as a separation of food and culture. It allows people to accept food but not the people who are attached to the food through their personal history. It reminds her of a particular time in culinary history where food was simply a means of sustenance and detached from storytelling. 'People were just cooking the food and weren't articulate enough to tell the stories, especially those who learn in cooking schools.' The chef feels this is what compelled her to eventually foster the kitchen staff she currently does, something that will be covered in greater detail in the upcoming sections on gender and placemaking.

In addition to the separation of the person from food, appropriation is also about profit. chef B uses the examples of turmeric lattes and *chai* tea, to question how much of it commodifies a food heritage and reduces it to a trend – a trend that is for those outside the South Asian diaspora. The frustration grows when such everyday items of food for one culture become known, popularised, and profited through its Westernised adaptations. Additionally, it is the very food that once was looked down upon or considered 'smelly' – reinforcing this idea of the '*murgh*' at home versus outside the home – the value is only appreciated when there's a sense of erasure from its less than desirable cultural background. This invites a tension

between how we choose to embrace foods without its context, and if we can attribute popularity of something like turmeric to a 'consequence of successful integration of migration or rather a case of appropriation through countless adaptations' (Parasecoli, 2022). Again, chef B emphasises the ways in which a food item like ghee can be capitalised as part of a seemingly 'white' Western wellness experience – an effect of the class consumption that can be veiled as an embrace of the 'other'.

Extraction of a food from its culture, monetising from such an adaptation, without recognition of the context is where appropriation becomes problematic. Culinary appropriation can become an issue similar to that of plagiarism – done without the necessary referencing or recognition of a history. There is a sense of ambivalence, again, where in an effort to preserve a cultural history, boundaries are emphasised. It is a tricky position that does not negate access nor the pleasure that is to be derived from eating a range of cuisines but one that emphasises understanding and acknowledgement – for example, the case of curry houses mentioned above, where the food is criticised for not being 'Indian', but without a context or history of curry houses. As introduced in the previous chapter, Mannur calls this 'culinary citizenship', where one has 'the ability to claim and inhabit certain identitarian positions via their relationship to food' – just as Jaffrey does in her initial books on Indian cookery (Mannur, 2009). However, this is precisely where contemporary chefs like the participants differ from a static approach of cooking and instead, think of food as a point of exploration of history, of culture, and of how food changes over time. It is also not just the food itself, but the kitchen and the role of women in such spaces, as chef A argues. The participants relationship to food has become a conscious decision by which they perform their heritage – not only is this distilled through nostalgia of a 'past' but also through discovery of a place that is constantly changing – for example, learning new recipes through parents, neighbours, strangers, chefs, and adapting them to become their own.

What makes their interpretation of culinary citizenship unique is the recognition that food evolves, and as a result, serves as a constant update to their own identity in relation to their heritage. As such, it is important to qualify that 'the culinary landscape of the country is the result of ongoing adaptations, hybridisations, and creolisation', which is how any cuisine forms and mutates – something that scholars and food writers have tracked through the Columbian Exchange, colonisation, break-up of Empire, migration, and various key world events - not many dishes can be considered totally autochthonous. However, as these chefs argue, when food becomes primarily seen as a commodified good, it is in danger of losing its story – this story, while rooted in place, recognises that the ingredients, dishes, and people can belong to many places at once. While food remains the significant connection to a heritage, it is what their relationship signifies that gives it meaning. Chef A maintains her relationship with her mum through a shared language of food. Chef B negotiates with her hybrid-heritage by allowing food to influence both her British and Pakistani identity. Both chefs are conscious of the gendered roles as part of their heritage and use food to work through their ambivalences of responsibility, labour, and of empowerment. It is precisely this concept that allows us to reimagine what belonging can look like through our relationship with food.

The Role of Commensality - Gender, Space and Place

So far, this chapter has established the relationship the chefs have had with food, because of food, and how they practice their heritage through food. This section turns to the relationship these chefs have formed with their diners, community, and the experience of eating in their public/private space. As female chefs, both represent a niche community within the food industry. As South Asian chefs, they are well-suited to comment and analyse food domestically and outside the home in restaurants and supper clubs. The analogy used by chef A earlier '*ghar ki murghi, dal barabar*' is, once again, useful here. Home cooking in South Asia is widely seen as a role for women in the home, yet it was not an expectation that either had to fulfil growing up. Otherwise seen as adomestic duty, an unpaid responsibility, an offer of love, an experience of pleasure – all these seemingly opposing things are held true at the same time, as ambivalence towards food would suggest. However, in restaurants which are often staffed with men, chef A and B's role takes on heightened meaning as not only chefs but as restaurateurs and entrepreneurs who design their business to reflect their values. Chef A repeatedly stresses 'men with the same C.V.' as a motivating factor to build the kitchen she has today.

This section will be broken down in two subsections - my dinner with chef B at Charsi Karahi, where we discuss Empress Market and her supper clubs, and chef A kitchen and restaurant. Similar to Chapter 3, I begin with analysing the restaurant space and make connections to placemaking, gender, and the act of commensality. I also make connections to the other side of nostalgia, of idealising aspects of home, and how both participants question and critique systemic structures of gender, nationality, and food through their cooking and their business.

Charsi Karahi

Chef B has never been to this restaurant physically, but it is a favourite amongst her and her family for a takeaway. She selected Charsi Karahi purposefully because it is quite a meaty restaurant and, as she suggests, 'meat eating, meat cooking, is a male dominated space' – *charsi karahi* is also a popular dish – *charsi* referring to meat sellers and karahi is the deep wok-like vessel in which the meat is cooked. Charsi Karahi in Norbury is advertised as serving authentic Afghan/Asian food, is a narrow space – half of the restaurant is fitted with a grill, which is where you often find the chef preparing the food and taking time to engage in conversation with the customers. It is a visible and congenial environment – at the time of our visit, the customers appeared like either regulars or family, speaking in Urdu. The diners occupy the other half of the restaurant, sitting in family-style booths, each fitted with a curtain that is meant to be drawn once the food arrives. The curtains provide a layered meaning to a semi-public/private experience of dining. Chef B takes immediate notice of the curtains and informs me of another place she frequents that has a similar set-up –

'There's another place called Namak Mandi in Tooting that my friends and I go to and we'll be like lads. I think the curtains are, well, you're eating bones so it's not the most attractive. When I was at Namak Mandi, we had the curtains drawn, and my friend and I were laughing away, relaxed with our legs up, and somehow the curtain fell, and we felt very exposed. We weren't doing anything wrong, but it felt wrong.'

In this anecdote, the chef implies her behaviour as 'masculine' and therefore, something that would have been perceived as 'wrong'. The curtain, however, provided a privacy that allowed them to be relaxed, as if they were at home in a public space. The curtain, and the private feeling, at its very basic level, means one can properly eat around the bones with hands, and consume food without the gaze of others besides immediate dining companions. For my lunch companion, it is the more enjoyable way to eat, yet something that feels gendered. The extension of home in Charsi Karahi was made more evident beyond the grill and restaurant style booths. There were children's toys, a shoe rack and more that were leading up to stairs, which is likely where the family who runs the restaurant live. She analyses that 'it makes it a safer place to work for women, especially, if they're working where they live and, in this industry, where you have late shifts…'

Chapli Kebab and Kashmiri Pilau at Charsi Karahi

Chef B attributes her observations and in-conversation analysis, as she looks around the restaurant for the first time, from having studied South Asian domesticity in the films Brick Lane and The Namesake. These two films, as she writes in her thesis, have a particular emphasis on food and clothing as an important part of South Asian community and diasporic culture, set in the UK and the US. In her academic life, she began to prioritise and challenge aspects of her heritage. Her upbringing in both London and Pakistan only covers part of her story. It is evident that the chef's story isn't hers alone but shared with the history and lineage of her family, many of whom also share a nomadic journey,

'via Delhi, Lucknow, and a lot of us lived in Iraq. If I had to write it down, South London is where our family has lived the longest. Our grandparents, when they first came to London, lived in Stockwell. My nan didn't leave the house for a long time because she was terrified and when she did, anytime she saw another Asian woman, they'd become friends. The first that happened was when she went to Brixton market and saw people who looked like her and Brixton became our place.'

Chef B lists a number of places – these cities and countries are geographies that have had some interaction with her family. In recounting of such places, there is a sense of hybridity rather than fragmentation – these places are mentioned as an 'added' location to her sense of place. Her tone and mannerisms convey that these places hold meaning to her family's migration story and become special, even if she hasn't been to many of these places herself. At first glance, the words she uses depict a positive association – a collection of memories, communities, but within these stories, as she goes into greater detail, are moments of dislocation revealed. For example, the inescapable reason for migration at all was the impact of colonisation and the result of partition. Then there are the everyday examples that, even in their simplicity, are nuanced in meaning.

While thinking of adjustment in London, the chef talks about her grandma and how she was often filled with anxiety at the thought of leaving her home. She doesn't share much about what scared her grandma, mostly because she only has assumptions – her grandma moved with her husband at a time where the UK didn't feel particularly welcoming or safe. Her own sense of mobility felt restricted – internalised, perhaps by the foreign gaze that awaits her, leaving her particularly vulnerable. When she did manage to venture out, it was to Brixton Market, a place that felt familiar – food shopping, a communal space, and a place of gathering and dwelling. Surrounding herself with other women who were doing their daily shop, especially other South Asian women, gave her a sense of comfort. The physical space felt like it was expanding, with greater security in her mobility as she walked along the market.

The relationship chef B's grandma began to have with Brixton, especially for the social relations it brought, meant Brixton became special for the chef because it became a place of routine for her family. The market was part of a repetitive commute and of placemaking, which can be seen as 'a response to desire for fixity and for security of identity in the middle of all the movement and change. A sense of place, of rootedness, can provide - in this form and in this interpretation - stability and a source of unproblematical identity' (Massey, 2007). Ambivalence is useful, again, to think through the chef's family and history of mobility and migration, and the desire of stability and rootedness. As previously stated, belonging is felt because un-belonging has been experienced. South London, Brixton Market in particular, becomes a place of safety for chef B's grandmother, because of the exclusions she felt elsewhere. These places were made meaningful because it provided a starting point of everyday life in London and represented a 'constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus' (ibid). The chef's appreciation of Brixton grew the

more she visited – it is not just about the South Asian camaraderie her grandmother found but, in the participants own visits, it became about the specific Jerk chicken shop, or the other shops she would frequent with her friends. Her connection to the market carried on from her family and was unique to her but it grew out of social relations and personal markers of identity through food and other tangible experiences that were initially identified by her grandmother. The attachment to the place was evolving as she would have new experiences. It is this progressive sense of place that remains elastic and becomes part of her multilayered identity.

Chef B's professional self has always been close to her personal and intimate self. She began working in the film industry and now as a chef to further her ambition of storytelling with a cultural focus on South Asia. 'I used to work in documentaries, and I wanted to tell stories. I made some films about Pakistan, current affairs, but the corporate structure didn't suit me. I had my dream career, but it was unfulfilling'. Looking for a change from the monotony of the everyday, she decided to become a freelancer, hoping it would unsettle the corporate lifestyle she was used to. During her time as a freelancer, she was able to tell stories she wanted but the subject matter was often difficult and heavy. Food, or so she thought, was meant to offer a light-hearted relief, while nonetheless engaging with the stories she prioritises. Food trucks were at their peak in 2013 and 2014, which is around the time chef B began her business as a pastime, and assumed there would be an organic audience for her food given the popularity of pop-ups.

Food became a natural gateway into the South Asian identity. Chef B wanted to explore and understand her heritage, which was foundational to her upbringing living between the coloniser and the colonised spaces of the UK and Pakistan. The 'folklore' of Asian identity, as she previously suggests, is heavily dependent on food as the driver of the South Asian migrant and diaspora story. It becomes an 'acceptable way to engage', chef B shares. However, there is danger in romanticising and idealising the nostalgia of the homeland through food. It is what families did, after all, to have a 'taste of home', but also how a diasporic community forges an identity post-migration. As Mannur explains, mango chutney – which is so popular in the UK, 'does not bear any independent intrinsic value as comestible; its value inheres in its symbolic connection to an articulation of national identity' (Mannur, 2009). While food may be an 'acceptable' way to engage with a diaspora's home, it does not mean it is without its own politics. How foodstuffs become a symbol of national identity is an example of how pervasive place, belonging, and attachments to a 'nation' can be. The ambivalence of food and nationalism is negotiating between closed-off narratives of heritage that can lend itself to nationalist projects yet recognising that culinary traditions and folklores can also empower and bring pleasure to the diasporic individual, as was the case for chef B and her business.

Gender, Food, and Heritage

I have employed ambivalence to demonstrate how the participants are often in a position where they negotiate between tensions – of food and nationalism, be that of their heritage, or of life in the UK. In chapter 2, I highlighted the ambivalence of food and gender where food

labour, domesticity, and hospitality are seen as feminine attributes and women become the brokers of cultural traditions, as suggested by Mannur. The negotiation, therefore, is reconciling with food as both a potential for empowerment and disempowerment – of responsibility and of pleasure. In my conversations with the chefs, there is palpable weight on this tension that is complicated not only by their chosen profession, but as women of the South Asian diaspora. Yet, their experience of cooking as domestic responsibility is also a marker of their difference from other participants as encountered in the previous chapter. For the chefs, food and hybridity are tools to explore their multiple identities. While I was not able to properly explore the role of food for the participants in the previous chapter, our limited conversations on food did not have the same ambivalence as it does for the chefs. Yet, it is a different kind of ambivalence granted by the difference in their class, economic, and other positionalities.

Chef B's narrative suggests that food has allowed her to digest the history of her family, and by extension, the places her family has lived. However, her sentiments towards a cultural or national identity are not romanticised nor an idealised vision of the past. She continues to negotiate between the tensions and moments of struggle faced by women in a patriarchal society, as she describes her experience towards food.

> 'I would be the friend who was always cooking but I found myself not wanting to cook for a long time. I would deliberately not make good rotis or chai because it was often forced on women. I pushed that sense of responsibility away and I had these things that I knew I could cook but when I'd make a Sunday roast – parboiled potatoes and in retrospect, it was a resistance to being tied down to the kitchen.'

So far, chef B has talked at length about the importance of her heritage and how that has led to a career in storytelling. She balances her cultural pride with critiquing and challenging historical gendered relations in both the UK and Pakistan. Her countless memories of huge family gatherings would mean 'women make the food, clean, and the guys watch football and lounge with their food coma.' The most frequent request would be 'go make chai', which made her question,

> 'Why am I being told what to do? We weren't explicitly told it (was) because we were girls, but we knew we were expected to do certain things. However, we eventually were very fortunate. All the siblings and I have creative careers. I don't want to say 'freedom' but we were given a lot of opportunities. Freedom implies it's something we had to 'earn', but we had the space to do what we wanted.'

The 'space' becomes a site of negotiation – while the participant recognises the ways her family might behave against their cultural or religious expectations of her, there are certain unavoidable concerns of being a South Asian woman. As Amrit Wilson explains, there are certain pressures South Asian mothers face and are forced to take a role where they 'socialise their children into an acceptance of patriarchal boundaries' because they 'know that if anything 'goes wrong', they will be blamed' (Wilson, 2006). I want to highlight once again

that 'time' is often used as a metric for progress or something that is linear. For example, with time, it is assumed that patriarchal traditions and norms become less prevalent. However, the chefs' mum's concern of marriage can coincide with the ways in which she is also rejecting other traditions and norms expected of her as a mother.

> 'I am 35 and not married. If I am doing manual work – which I often am in setting up for supper clubs or catering events, they'll ask 'are you sure you want to be doing this?' They would never ask my brothers – although if they did simple tasks, it would be like 'woah, slow clap'. My younger brother is still like that. He did his laundry for the first time in his late 20s and expected applause.'

Chef B's use of 'space' is two-fold where she comments on the expectations of her family home and outside her family home. It is both a physical space that dictates expectations, and a space where she challenges some gender norms. While in her family home, she can have a creative career, and appreciate it is, more often than not, uncharacteristic for South Asian women in her family. This space is attached to a sense of South Asian conventions, where domestic tasks are a knowledge that is expected from her, but not her brothers. Marriage, even if not forced, is still a question that looms more noticeably for her than her male siblings. For her, the patriarchal and cultural boundaries that exist 'to some extent' in the home, are challenged, but not as rigorously as she challenges them outside her family home.

> 'There is an assumption that your home is where your parents are but that's the last place I can be myself – my siblings and I do not drink in front of my parents or talk about certain things. My mum will sometimes attempt to drink baileys to bond with us and say, 'let's be naughty together!' She drinks out of a Turkish tea glass; you know the really small ones? There is a sense of you're never fully yourself, but is that a part of belonging? The part where you are dealing with a bit of discomfort? I have some English friends who don't understand certain aspects of my life. Desi friends who don't understand some aspects of mine nor I theirs - I'll be in Pakistan and say all you do is go to restaurants and weddings and they're like what else is there to do mate? We can't go to bars or clubs! So, I don't fully belong there either.'

For chef B, the sense of belonging comes and goes, and at times, it feels like she can't truly belong anywhere, where no place feels like home. Therefore, it is an experience understood in comparisons – something as mundane as being asked to make chai, something that is not asked of her brothers. Belonging is felt because un-belonging has been experienced. The comparison is not just of home itself but that of place –

> 'Having done my A Levels in Pakistan, I had friends who got married quite young. They lived a lifestyle where they had household help, as anyone middle class tends to. These 'things' were around me enough that I wanted to have a resistance. As I got older, I realised how much power and agency women had around the kitchen – this was simply a life skill. My brother can't make a bed or boil an egg – like when people

ask for me a good dal recipe, that is just a life skill to be able to make something like that, something you eat every day.'

The comparisons, at first, are between a traditional Pakistani culture and a western, British culture –

> 'You are being gawked at in certain areas. I feel like my body language was different from other girls. I could do something simple like walk across the road and my friends would point out how wrong I was and that I made a scene. The last time I was in Pakistan, we were buying something for my sister's wedding. When we got to the car, we realised the lace on the material was damaged and we went to return it. The salesman refused to exchange it and raised his voice, using his body language to basically suggest 'say another word'. It wasn't a culture that respects women, and you are constantly reminded of being second-class to be honest.'

Chef B shared a harrowing story of an acquaintance who was murdered by her boyfriend in Pakistan. 'We always imagined violence against women but somehow feel immune to a certain kind of violence if you are from a middle-class background,' but the grotesque nature of this murder shattered an illusion of safety, emphasising a second-class existence for women. The boyfriend is known to her friends for repeated violent offences against women. His parents are aware of his behaviour and managed to easily shield him from any sort of legal repercussions.

> 'When women say things, the story is flipped on you. I used to get the cautionary tales a lot from my parents who would be like 'you can't dress certain ways'. There's an assumption that women in Pakistan don't, you know, wear revealing clothes, but they do - my friends did, especially on holidays in Dubai. I was desperate to wear skimpy outfits and find a way around the 'no sleeveless' rule so I'll just wear capped sleeves and the tightest clothes. It started to feel like an act of resistance.'

The chef doesn't simplify the gender and cultural difference of Pakistan and the UK, or believe the latter presents an ideal of gender equity. A cross-cultural lived experience meant the prominence of sexist encounters occupied a lot of space, reflection, and she doesn't reduce it to a patronising and racially charged rendition of what is 'expected' harassment in Pakistan. Her stories aren't of a life in Pakistan, or a life in England, but as someone who navigates both spaces, most of the time.

> 'I wrote about that (sexism) for my dissertation. Men go out in public, engage with the world, and eat their fish and chips and fried egg and chips or whatever, wearing their suits. Women are the ones always responsible to honour, display, and perform their culture. And they are cooking throughout the day, wearing a Sari or Salwar Kameez at home. Watching ZeeTv at home was a powerful way of reminding women of who they are. Especially in a place where you are constantly being denied it. It is

not unique to Pakistan or the UK, I don't think. It exists within other cultures - women being the carers, at the same time, have the burden of reproducing culture.'

Food fell into this burden for a long time as something she intrinsically wanted to rebel against. It was a recognition that something else should be nurtured – a career – in lieu of domestic responsibilities. It is not that the chef did not want to learn or enjoy cooking when younger, but it was the attitude towards such gendered tasks that inspired a resistance. It meant never learning how to cook from her mum or grandmother, as the common troupe seems to be in South Asian recipes. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Sukhwadwala questions this very cliche that seems so prominent in food culture and writing, where the 'problematic pursuit of "authenticity" through appeals to a mythic matriarch is simply done to death'[38]. Chef B resisted these norms, yet recognises that cooking and the space of the kitchen was a transformative space, regardless of being in Pakistan or the UK –

> 'As I got older, though, I realised how much power and agency women had around the kitchen – this was a life skill. There is a lot of power in the space and it's a space that belongs to women, in their greatest number, and yes, it's in the domestic space, but it shouldn't be discounted for that reason.'

The chef's use of resistance has evolved – initially to resist restrictive norms and avoid the assumed responsibilities of her as a South Asian woman. The word then takes on new meaning as she later began to recognise the ways in which the restrictive spaces can actually be transformative and critically challenges how gender norms take shape to begin with. Without recognising the marginal space as a site of resistance, assuming a singular and limiting image of women in the kitchen, with no agency of their own – as Sukhadwala reminds us, 'let's liberate our mothers and grandmothers from the burden of "tradition". Let's change the narrative on Indian food' (ibid). I want to expand this very thought by problematising 'authenticity' again and challenge the idea that a kitchen can only be seen as a place of domestic duty to reproduce 'traditional' food and therefore a cultural burden of care and responsibility. The kitchen, so often reduced to a place where women 'belong', has the potential to become a purposeful space, a conscious effort to disrupt the negative, gendered idea of cooking, but also that of what they are cooking. It is with this intention that chef B has come to repair her relationship with food, with the idea that her female Pakistani identity is incumbent on the perfect round roti, or that she cannot be innovative or be original in her cooking. Equally important, repairing the relationship with food was paramount because it is an everyday activity, which began a re-exploration of pleasure, of practising heritage in a way that empowered her and eventually, inspired the chef's business.

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[38] Sukhadwala, S. (2021) *Why do Indian recipes always have to come from some mythic grandmother?, The Guardian*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/dec/29/indian-recipes-mythic-grandmother-burden-tradition (Accessed: 10 November 2023).

Pop-Ups and Supper Club

> 'My parents and I were having a picnic at Brockwell park, and my dad said he missed having a bun kebab. It's a Karachi specific pastry - the Delhiwallas (those who migrated from Delhi post-partition) who came to Karachi and settled started it.'

The *bun kebab* is a *shami*-style *kebab*, mixed with lentils and a whipped egg white coating in a potato or brioche bun. 'There was an abundance of burgers, so it's burger bun – it's like a cousin of vada pav but a Muslim version'. Having never heard of a bun kebab before, chef B expands, 'there are different versions, they can be the shape of your hand, one that is smaller. It is only from Karachi though. If you speak to people from Lahore, they don't know it. It is hand pulverised meat - if you do it in the blender, you can't really feel the ratio of the meat'. The chef thought there was a gap in the market as no one was making bun kebabs in London and, having just quit BBC a few months prior, thought 'Oh, I'll do it!'
Chef B found herself very quickly in the throes of her new business, setting up four to five local markets a week. She learnt through trial and error, and with the good fortune of having a father who works in the import/export of confectionery and was able to source *tawas* – a large flat griddle/wok – from Pakistan. This food venture also meant that the chef had to immerse herself greatly into the food of her heritage, but it also provided time and space for bonding with her parents. Her dad would drive her to markets – which could be upwards of hours, while her mum would help her in the kitchen. She received a crash course in business management and cooking, and now offers informal consultancy to other start-up chefs.

My first introduction to the chef was through email. Even in our first exchange, she had a well-articulated narrative, where she shared, 'storytelling is integral to my style of cooking and the menus I design. Also, my relationship with food has been complex over the years, disassociating from my heritage cooking as an act of resistance and coming back to it as I reconnect to my cultural identity'. It was apparent that the themes of this research were inherently part of the chef's own thinking and business.

The chef often selects themes and dishes that translate within cultures and influence traditions. For example, she describes, 'the Balochi dish - where I want to do a whole lamb. Apparently, there is an etiquette to eating it. If you are with your in-laws, you don't eat the back of the animal. If there is a bride, you give her a rib for fertility'. This feels like old folklore but for the chef, they permeate modern culture. Importantly many dishes and ingredients also have a different point of origin than might be expected.

> 'I wanted to have a BBQ event – something, again, that is often very 'manly'. I'm against the idea of… when people talk of origin. Like this dish is from this one place. But the food has travelled – *baingan ka bharta* is basically like *babaganoush*. It's a different version of the same dish, it has travelled through different hands, attached itself to certain regions. If we look at Britain, the dinner table here is laid by travel.'

Embodying the hybrid sense of her heritage, chef B's menu has a distinct collaboration of Pakistani flavours with 'Western' techniques. The supper club is an exploration of a melting point long present in South Asian cooking.

> 'The same 'hybrid' style cooking has happened for so long in India and Pakistan. The Mughal Empire age of cooking, the 'Queen' age of cooking. Food is coming from so many areas. The *dhaba* comes from partition – it's where Hindus and Muslims migrating arrived on either land, or it's where they started eating. They had communal tandoors!'

The menu for the supper club included salt baked potatoes and charred corn ribs – corn cooked on coals are a common street food in South Asia, while the 'ribs' have become a recent trend in British restaurants. Served with the addition of a coriander chutney, it becomes a way for the chef to show her 'hand' on the dish, through the choice of ingredients and presentation. The menu also has adopted a particular language in its descriptions that is 'more Western than Pakistani' the chef claims – 'jaggery crumb, burnt mango', for example, is more aligned with what you would find at restaurants in the UK, something that can appeal to all diners and be understood in its Western, London context. Her desire for the supper club I attended was to peel back layers of South Asian cooking, noting its influences from history, calling this an evolution of how coal cooking has developed over the years.

Supper clubs are not just about the consumption of food but an invitation to understand how the food has met with several encounters to end up on the plate. It is not just an education for the diners that participate, but for chef B herself, who uses her role as chef to choose a theme and immerse herself in the history of the food and its cooking methods. In every supper club, she is reflecting on what home and belonging means, even if it is in the background of her eventual invite to diners – there is a sense that she is working through what it means to be a British Pakistani woman. It is a relationship between Numra and the diner that fosters reciprocity – very basically, of course, is the financial cost of attending such an event, but it requires a more active participation than a regular meal at a restaurant.

> 'My supper clubs are themed dining events, each course punctuated with spoken word or academic talks. I like to showcase other performers and researchers in the field as I feel this strengthens the sense of community that is integral to South Asian hospitality.'

I attended chef B's Supper club at a collaborative space (it is sometimes a cafe, sometimes a venue for pop-ups, sometimes it remains empty) just off Brick Lane. The large dining tables, sharing platters, and service invited a particular kind of vulnerability – this dining experience was dynamic and required you to make conversation with people sitting on your table from the basic 'can you pass this' to 'what is your connection with South Asian cuisine?' I sat with chef's family friend who attends these supper clubs as often as she can, finding comfort and excitement in eating what she is familiar with an innovative twist – twists that her family was used to employing, as well, substituting ingredients where necessary. Before the starters, chef

B invites everyone to this event, and claims this dinner is an extension of her goal as a chef, which is to 'challenge the idea of authenticity'. The dishes served included *Shami beef kebab* with a mint *labneh*, a strained yoghourt more common in Middle Eastern cooking, taking the place of 'traditional', looser in texture yoghourt, more common in South Asia. She combines the popular South Asian *bharwa baingan* and Lebanese *mahshi betenjan,* both made with aubergine and stuffed with minced lamb as one smoky dish. It is apparent how her words match her cooking style.

Coal and open fire cooking lead the conversations between meals. The chef assembles guest speakers who have intimate knowledge on the subject to share the history and impact of coal as an element, from eating clay to the ways in which it has been used to remove toxins in South America. One of the speakers, from the British Council, shared the relevance of materials in revealing inequalities and the effect of colonialism in South Asia. Using an example of an everyday household item, the cup for chai, the speaker informs us how those from a higher caste would never drink from the terracotta cups as those belonged exclusively to the lower caste. Glass, therefore, would be preferred for those of a higher caste, and of course, the British. The speaker ties this to the way such items and materials can have a romanticised view of how food is served. The material itself becomes the 'exotic' element that re-emphasises the food itself. For example, having biryani in an earthen pot, or desserts and chai in a *kulhar,* and the popular clay-oven, tandoor, used for making *naan.* The materials used are 'authentic', which would mean the food is, too.

In my informal conversation with the speaker, she shares how fulfilling it was to speak to a group of people who seem genuinely interested in her work. She notes the diversity of the diners, how engaged they seem, and many were curious to ask follow-up questions about the project. She noticed some nods from South Asian diners who may share this knowledge and can picture the *kulhar*. Other diners, who are sitting near me and less familiar, search online for pictures to get an idea of what the cup looks like. The experience of commensality, with a sense of direction, is aided by the food and the presentations. The conversations are intimate, vulnerable, and they are ruminations on culture, heritage, colonisation – topics that may not be part of just any or every dinner conversation. This is precisely what chef B hopes happens at her event –

> 'I don't want to sit at your dinner table, you don't have to pull up a chair for me, I set my own table and hope that others can create their own tables, that is what creates a community together. There are three things I want people to talk about on the dinner table - politics, religion, and money. If food is bringing us together, our guards are already down, and we're already vulnerable so this is the space, and the point is to have important conversations that make us uncomfortable. If we are already tensed up, we can't have the same conversation. If these spaces make us vulnerable, it makes our conversations vulnerable and honest.'

Prior to this supper club, the chef organised another that was a commemoration of when the formation of Pakistan was officially recognised. The menu was inspired by the menu that was

served at the Karachi Club in 1947, where the food on offer was not particularly 'Pakistani' or South Asian. Instead, the menu included '*Grapefruit, Asparagus Soup, Sole & Prawn Italian, Braised Chicken, and Bagatelle-aux-fruits*'. The chef took this menu and gave it her signature hybrid meaning – *Braised Chicken with a cumin and coriander rub, charred asparagus with labneh and a chilli brown butter, and the Bagatelle-aux-fruits was accompanied by a ginger cake and jaggery cream*. Chef B spoke proudly of how this made more sense to her as a menu for the event.

The invitation for the supper club 'encourages guests to spark conversations about the idea of modern-day nations and creating multicultural communities'. The chef clarifies this was not an event about 'yay, I'm Pakistani', but questioning what the identity she carries and what it means in her day-to-day life. For example, her family isn't only from Pakistan but pre-partition, part of her family also lived in Uttar Pradesh, India. This supper club was interesting because…

> 'It tapped into a lot of people's sense of identity. The shame we have as Pakistanis, the damage that has done, the Muslim identity, the creation of Bangladesh, the chaos of war. There were written mandates where soldiers were told to rape the women – this was the war cry. I can't speak on behalf of the Bengali identity, but this was the perspective of a West Pakistani poet who was speaking at the supper club, describing the sense of desperation.'

This is exactly the vulnerability and uncomfortable conversations such supper club aims to provide a space for. Not with the intention of making diners uncomfortable, but to provide an opportunity to talk about things that we don't often confront, simply because they are difficult. This was place-making in action, even if temporary in the physical space, the experience that it offers is carried beyond the event with the chef and, hopefully, other diners.

> 'My mum published a book where she transcribes our oral history. My grandparents' generation is getting older, and she was worried their stories would be lost and as she was writing, she realised it would be an interesting story to tell. She did a reading of the book, of my grandmother's experience of partition at the supper club and during it, there was pin drop silence. It was an intense subject, and she describes in detail what they saw and things I didn't even know until my mum wrote them for the book. My grandmother had a baby who died during partition when they were in transition. The baby died while she was breastfeeding. The baby was on her nipple, and she died. These were sacrifices people made to get to another place, the trauma they have been carrying.'

This generational trauma, something chef B has talked about throughout our conversation, is a driving force as to why her story is not her story alone. As bell hooks posits in Yearning, 'our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting' (hooks, 1989). The chef gives an example of another speaker at this supper club, a poet, who describes moments of 'catching light' to shine on the multiple identities held by migrants – something that is

meaningful to the chef's personal experience of self. The idea of 'catching light' suggests there are parts of our identity that are out of view, while others are not. The same can be said of this sense of memory – those moments that are out of view. As hooks suggests, 'fragments of memory which are not simply represented as flat documentary but constructed to give a 'new take' on the old, constructed to move us into different modes of articulation' (hooks, 1989). This is why the participant's s history is part of her present. She recognises that these are intense conversations over a meal, but this space of reflection doesn't end at the supper club. hooks thought of language as a place of struggle, and the supper club can serve as a safe space in which such difficult language is shared.

From first-hand experience, while the physical space of the chef's supper clubs may vary, the space of commensality feels intimate, where the conscious recognition of individual and community struggles is part of a process of sharing our ambivalences. The supper club has a prohibition-like allure, the relationship is not between just the diner and the meal in front of them but those around the table. This relationship extends to chef B who speaks at intervals, and to those presenting between courses. It is unsurprising that 'the original supper clubs were about rebellion'[39], as the chef's supper clubs attempt to gather like-minded diners for meaningful social connections. Sometimes, it can feel as if the food is lost with everything that is happening around you, but this is only a feeling in passing as the diner looks back at their plate and sees how the food has always been part of the dialogue in some way.

Food as Pleasure

As a business owner, chef B is constantly reassessing her mission. During the pandemic, she began freelancing and realised her food doesn't have be strictly one cuisine, under a Pakistani identity, serving only karahi's or biryani but she can 'take flavour points and allow it to grow and know I still have my hand in the food I am creating.' This echoes the evolving nature of food, one's relationship to it, and how it can interact with the social and cultural climate of London, where her business exists and serves people. As highlighted in *Gastronativism*, 'Heritage (as part of UNESCO's listing) must be a living expression of the embodied experience of a community. Practices, knowledge, and skills are not meant to be frozen in time or converted into museum pieces; they are supposed to be constantly evolving to respond to new situations' (Parasecoli, 2022). To this end, the chef poses several questions at herself –

> 'Where do I go from here? Open a place? Am I aiming for a bougie audience? What does a 'traditional' menu mean? 'What is a 'traditional' price point? – that's actually not possible as there is a lot of labour that goes into the food! Labour is underestimated and that frustrates me. People are getting paid per hour and it's not a

[39] Ramsden, J. (2011) *What's The future of the supper club?*, *The Guardian*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/wordofmouth/2011/feb/25/future-of-the-supper-club (Accessed: 13 November 2023).

hobby and I have to make that decision and draw that line – am I only catering for an audience which has a higher spending power?'

These ruminations are an insightful demonstration for how the themes of this research are constantly evolving – heritage, food, identity. It is precisely why 'negotiation' and 'ambivalence' are useful qualifiers for the experience and articulation of belonging. Even when positions are clarified – the recognition of food, cooking, and the kitchen as a counter-space of belonging and resistance – these feelings are subject to change and evolve themselves. The chef recognises the laborious task of making something she loves a job. 'When I first decided to make my dad the *bun kebab* that he missed, it was the desire to make him happy, reunite him with something he misses'. Food translated to resistance by active rejection, to empowerment, to a pastime. This eventually became chef B's job and an ongoing process by which to express her identity. However, she doesn't always find pleasure in cooking.

> 'I'm at a moment where I am tired. I used to run my newsletter and I paused doing that and I used to post a lot more on Instagram and I'd be reading a lot more, you know, about history and colonialism. Since I've been 'cheffing' more and my brain is in recipe development, I have had to turn off that side of my brain. I used to be more articulate about this and I had a better grasp about how I felt about this and now I have to think about it in a different way. I don't have the time and patience and I just want to watch American Horror Story – but to turn my brain off and I like that I can have this conversation and tap into it again.'

Chef B does not feel the burden or duty to teach people about her culture, however there is a performance that is required at supper clubs that is unique to the event itself. The dinner is not a passive occasion but a form of advocacy to shine the light on invisibilised parts of history. This feeling is, sometimes, in tension with food being a consumption and practice of pleasure.

> 'I love eating, my greatest joy is trying new dishes, figuring out flavours. I was at an event the other day and I was asking the other chefs to guess the spices in dishes I made. I started working in this industry because I enjoy cooking so much. But when you become a 'jobbing' chef, working for other people, and the stress of running events and the other drama that it brings, the pleasure starts to diminish. It is an active effort to reconnect with why you do the work that you do. I love cooking when I don't have to do it all the time. And it's the stuff around cooking, too – washing the dishes! It is upsetting when you have that relationship with the thing you love the most.'

As established, these identities and relationships are constantly in-flux, that are worked through in their ambivalences. Even though the chef is clear it is not a burden, there is significant responsibility for her business to represent a South Asian experience – of food, hospitality, and something that needs more nuanced research. In her work, there are moments of reawakening pleasure, especially in something that once carried shame or disgust,

particularly when it comes to certain items of food or dishes. Finding pleasure in rotis, that were once the bane of chef B's cooking, 'reignites the interest of a community in its own products, which may have been considered plain, unexciting, or even backward' (Parasecoli, 2022). The round roti was a symbol of being in the kitchen as part of the female duty for the chef, and many South Asian women. As briefly introduced in the previous chapter, Sabba Khan, an artist, published a project titled '*Recipes for Resilience*' where she uses a rolling pin to 'explore print making and the process of repetition by engraving, scoring, and reshaping the pin' (*Sabba Khan – Recipes For Resistance – Raju Rage*, 2020). The rolling pin, a crucial part of the South Asian kitchen, is used as an allegory to tell a story of the Roti Maker. In one of her artworks, she symbolises roti to be 'not just food' but the 'ancestral survival skill passed down the maternal line. It is a rite of passage' (ibid).

In this image, Khan writes 'we've all tried to be the good daughter, wearing the dupatta (shawl), whilst cooking, trying to do everything to please mamma (mother) and abu-ji (father)'. The idea of the 'good' daughter is reminiscent of the 'good' immigrant – as previously discussed, what is 'good' and who decides this is constantly adapting and those in position to decide retain power. For South Asian women, in the case of Khan's image, the power is with the parents to make claims on what is 'good' behaviour. Khan questions 'Can I begin to cook roti again, shedding the old, limited notions I'd learnt, and find new meaning for roti in my life?' (ibid). The roti is a symbol of a family structure for Khan, a punishing accuracy of shape for chef B, and a part of heritage that feels like an obligation, not a food of pleasure. The process of rejecting and returning to cooking is part of a tension that is synonymous to a sense of belonging. The 'third space', is a lived space, 'which enables other positions to emerge' (Bhabha, 1994). Homi Bhabha posits this space 'initiates new signs of

identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation' (ibid). It is from this 'third space' that the hybrid and diasporic identity of chef B and Khan are able to mediate the symbol of a roti – through the repulsion of forced gender stereotypes, to the desire of familial food, and the myriad of feelings in between. Therefore, the 'hybrid strategy opens up a third space of/for rearticulation of negotiation and meaning' (ibid). It does, as chef B suggests, require an effort – to routinely question, challenge, celebrate, and have pleasure – becomes part of her experience of belonging.

Home and Restaurants

Prior to starting her restaurant, Chef A organised informal supper clubs on Sunday afternoons in her home. Eventually, this spilled over to a pop-up and eventually, a brick-and-mortar restaurant, but the tradition of supper clubs in this new space continued.

As food started to take greater meaning to secure comfort in her everyday life, chef A grew more at ease with life in the UK. She began to befriend women around her neighbourhood in London. Having little community of her own, she invited these women, who she sensed felt similarly, with the promise of *chapli kebab* to her house. These South Asian women were working as nannies for European families, many living in the UK without their immediate families. Working in European households, most of these women weren't able to cook the food they wanted out of fear – the smell of South Asian home cooking wasn't always welcomed. Chef A explains their gatherings would take place on Saturday nights and Sundays when they were given a day off by the host families. Facing limited options, these women would wander around the streets of London, without many intimate relationships or a community to 'return' to, until the chefs' home. 'In the early days, when they were hungry, they would go to the Hammersmith Gurdwara and I met a few women there because I liked to go for the roti's they made', eventually bringing together a whole group of women. Asma shares what that feeling meant for her new friends, '*Memsahib, humko lagta hai ki hum ab hum ghar aagayye*' – ma'am, it feels like I have come home.

Chef A was living by the tube station at the time, where a lot of these women would congregate. They naturally formed a relationship as fellow South Asian women, living, as the chef pointed out earlier, in a less than welcoming UK. Meeting these women became a huge turning point for chef A in what became the early stages of an intimate 'supper club', which overtook her entire weekend. The women – who she refers to as a collective community, not singled out by name – would come over Saturday night, return to whatever their respective sleeping arrangement was, and return Sunday morning to make breakfast, which would often be *poha* - flattened rice, cooked with onion, spices, and the chef's favourite, peas. At the time, she didn't recognise the significance of what was happening –

> It was quite a remarkable time and unknowingly, and now I can see and analyse that – but at that time, it was just fun. We would watch TV, we would hang out in the kitchen, there would be lots of singing and laughter. One of them used to say to me, 'I laugh for the whole week when I come to your house'. We were loud, we got excited easily, we would sit around the table, and this was recreated every Sunday.

Food became an important part of homecoming for these women, just as it did for the chef. The same way she began to feel liberated through food, so did the act of being together in the kitchen, which became a source of freedom for everyone involved. Rebecca May Johnson, in *Small Fires,* explores Audre Lorde's poetry to describe how this act of food consumption has a deeper meaning – 'that the provision of food which venerates the body and bathes it in pleasure is not a luxury; it is indivisible from political struggle' (May Johnson, 2022). The community chef A assembled weren't able to access this homely pleasure in the space where they lived. That space wasn't malleable for them to engage in their food practices, at the fear of upsetting their European hosts. Chef A's 'kitchen is a site from which liberation can be imagined and practised and tasted in fragments' (ibid) on the Sunday's they were away from their usual accommodation. Yet, the kitchen forms a new space of relations and ambivalence, as I'll cover. Chef A's house manages to reproduce a similar sense of hierarchy between the chef and the women that they would find in their day to day lives living as nannies. Yet, they experienced a sense of home. Commensality here, the pleasure in the company, of being loud, and the familiar food was part of a political struggle that cannot be divorced from their belonging to the UK. It was the beginning of a counter-space of belonging and of place-making, which eventually moved out of the private space in chef's home.

The comfort in the private space, however, wasn't immediate and revealed power dynamics of class and caste between chef A and these women.

> 'Some of them who came to my house for the first time wouldn't sit on my sofa. I asked 'are you going to stand the entire time? How would that work?' So, I sat on the floor, and they joined me. No one sat on the chair and had chai. Although, that didn't happen for a second time.'

Such actions were understood as a sign of respect towards the chef, and by extension, her home. The space produced a social relation that would likely exist if they were in India. The very physical sense of space in chef A's home was imbued with a hierarchical meaning that dictated the kind of social relations these women felt comfortable exhibiting. Ambivalence, again, demonstrates the tension in such relations – where the women can feel a sense of home, yet are constrained, by some extent, their class and caste differences. Recognising these difference meant these women couldn't see themselves as the chef's equal. An image she chose to disrupt by sitting on the floor, inviting them to do the same. While I was unable to meet with any of these women in the chef's stories, their relationship poses questions that I could not explore any further. For example – how has the relationship between the women and the chef evolved? The chef, sharing from her perspective, attempted to unsettle their differences by taking space on the floor, but how was this seen or understood by the women in her home? While I have emphasised the importance of difference in this thesis, the experiences of these women are filtered through the participant, chef A, but her perception of belonging is not without the consideration of those she works, eats, and shares solidarity with. The chef says,

'They are, I now realise, quite unique women. They are strong, they are compassionate, and they understood very early on what I was presenting to them was a way to build a free future. Away from the constrained environments of their employer's house where they couldn't eat, laugh, listen to the music or films they wanted.'

hooks believed 'to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body' (hooks, 1989), where certain borders existed to remind hooks of her marginality as a black American living in a small town in Kentucky. These women who worked as nannies were invited to homes but 'always had to return to the margin' (ibid). Wha the chef was 'offering' was for a larger space, a counter-space, in which they could belong – to make their margin as part of their resistance, as hooks suggests. The 'offer' wasn't with a specific intention of disturbing the employment these women had, but rather, the extension of what became an act of pleasure in the kitchen, although not without its own power relations

'I could say it was my intention to hire an all-female kitchen, but it was not. I just needed people who knew how to cook like me – intuitively, not written instructions, actually know how to cook the food, every day, home food. Many of these women had not known or tasted the food I was cooking. For the first year and a half, they were just watching me, helping with the prep. 99% of Indian cooking is prep and chefs who say, 'I do this, I do that', that's the last bit of fanfare. I am not being humble; I am just being pragmatic. It is putting in the 'stuff', estimating, knowing the aromas, that is important. Everything else is equally important – the chopping, the maintenance, the cleaning, they did all that and watched me. I ended up with all females because when they first started coming in to help me, I realised they didn't give me the nonsense of 'how long does this take? 'What is the measurement? We measure with our eyes, it is absolutely '*andaaz*'.'

The pleasure of the company, of the food, of singing in Hindu, Gujarati, and so on and getting to speak in a language known best to these women eventually became the early start of the chef's business. The routine Sunday served a greater purpose in which cooking knowledge was being shared.

'They had a good idea of how to cook a huge amount of food very fast. It didn't matter if they had not made a specific food before - *korma's, kebabs*, some of these things they didn't even eat. They understood how to roll things, fry, marinate, chop. This is why these women were exactly the kind of people I could work with because they learned how to cook intuitively, and they are now replicating some of my family's dishes. Ammu (mum) came as well and taught them – some of these women that work for me have been part of my family for years. This is a huge advantage because they understand the food. India today is a horrible place but at the time they were there, there was a great sense of community in every colony, slum, house.'

This sense of community is reproduced in the chef's kitchen at her restaurant – it has become a place of rest for many of the chefs in the kitchen. The image she relays is the experience, again, of pleasure with food at the centre. Cooking lessons are more than just about taking notes on what or how to prepare certain dishes but offer interactions between everyone in the kitchen, sharing memories, and singing. The performance of recipes becomes choreographed to precision (as much as food can be replicated time and time again) so that those who eat chef A's food can taste the food just as her mum's catering business made it.

> 'They go into memory mode of the *basti (*village) and houses where they used to cook. Every sense is coming to play – sight, smell, touch, aroma, taste – that allows you to know exactly how to recreate the taste, the flavours of the dish and it becomes part of your memory. They can now make the same food without me.'

The chef clearly recognises her position vis-à-vis her staff, noting their domestic responsibilities at homes or villages, as compared to her 'impoverished aristocrat' upbringing where she was not expected to cook. Eventually, this business outgrew the chef's home kitchen and found another home in a brick-and-mortar site. Although, for chef A, it was the concern of her family and the lack of privacy every Sunday forced on her children that propelled the business elsewhere. She took her business and the community of women to a pop-up in central London. This pop-up idea came at a time where having Indian food at pubs weren't common, and before desi pubs would gain popularity. Reviews of the pop-up lauded the home-style cooking, which later resulted in the landlord offering her business bigger site as a stand-alone restaurant. The kitchen staff, however, remained all-female.

> 'Not to take away from male chefs and their achievements but almost all of them have a CV that looks identical. All went to culinary school, worked in hotels, they never learned at home because of, well, patriarchy. It is so deep-rooted in gender bias. No one would have their son hanging around the kitchen, making the food so they never learned how to cook in that way. In India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka - it is a woman cooking at home. But if you go to restaurants, the men are in charge.'

Chef A does not consider the kitchen, or the role of reproducing culture reserved for women to be a burden. Instead, she believes this to be a practice of authority reserved for women, and a reason why they cook as intuitively as she would like from her staff. The power of cooking sees 'the kitchen transform into a subversive social space' (Scicluna, 2017) that creates new social relations. Previously, these women were working as nannies, and, as the chef claims, lonely and without a sense of community. Their work in the kitchen – from chef A's home to the pop-up and eventually the restaurant – has transformed their social and economic lives, even if their power relations are maintained between employer and employee. In my conclusion in chapter 2, I summarised Berlant's response to cruel attachments, where they posit 'unlearning attachments' as a hopeful step towards a good life. Through food and working in the kitchens, chef A, and from her perspective, her chefs, are practising a detachment – the alienation felt without community, in a new country, in an unstable job – and instead, focus on attachments that are rewarding. I refer to this as a

'practice' of detachment because, this, too, is likely to evolve and change over time, and with a continuation of traditional hierarchies within the kitchen. However, in regard to having authority in the kitchen, chef A wishes to control what it means to represent a culture because this is linked to her desire of storytelling and, another space from which to confront ambivalence –

> 'There is not a single dish that does not link to the season, a festival, to being auspicious or not - you eat this when you are pregnant, this is what you serve when people die, this is what you eat in the summer. There is not a single occasion, good or bad, that you do not eat food. I am Muslim but I know people put food on the feet of God and Goddess in Hindu families. Food and service, in our culture, are linked to faith and to community. The whole idea of Langar in Sikh culture is powerful. If you want to eat the Langar food and not understand who these people are, why are they giving away food for free, why are people from different backgrounds cooking in the kitchen, where does their passion or commitment come from? If you do not tell these stories, it is our fault.'

Food is a medium of storytelling with which chef A makes sense of her identity – as a woman, as a Muslim, as a migrant in London. It is also an identity that she articulates as a businesswoman. Her desire is to control the narrative – because she does not want to be passive in her role as a 'custodian of recipes'. The chef uses the sense of marginality as a place to correct the condition of powerlessness that comes with a gender and cultural bias. If the kitchen and cooking serve as a marginalised space, then chef A will like to use it as a 'site one stays in, clings to even because it nourishes one's capacity to resist' (hooks, 1989). It is from this space where the chef wishes to be heard.

Belonging Differently

In this project, I had initially intended to identify a means of belonging – what is shared amongst all these participants in their practice, struggle, or ambivalence towards belonging or that 'destination of security' as posited by Sara Ahmed. The 'impasse' introduced in the previous chapter on Southall, is a point of 'ongoing thickness', where the everyday is managed. As the everyday is unique to each individual, mediated through their social relations and positionalities, working through the 'impasse' will be equally unique. While there are ways in which the stories of both chefs in this chapter overlap, there is no singular path towards a sense of belonging.

This chapter explores the experiences of chefs as those seemingly with authority to comment and dictate a public palette of South Asian taste. It was also a chance to reflect on the theories and concepts previously established. From the chapter outline the literature review, to the analysis on the politics of belonging, and the study of ambivalence, this chapter considers how dining and food is done – public spaces of consumption, the conflict of colonial and hybrid heritage of South Asian and British cuisine, the role of gender and placemaking – from the perspective of those intimately involved in its reproduction.

In 'belonging differently', there are identities that were not fully explored in our conversation. Both Chef A and B are Muslim women, and while they referenced their Muslim identity, neither went into much detail on how it influences or impacts their food choices or their sense of belonging. Either we ran out of time in our conversation, or religion wasn't a big part of their daily lives. References, instead, were made to class and caste, especially in the diverse kitchen staff that chef A works with. On a few occasions, chef A would suggest I speak to one of her chefs, recognising the privilege of her position differs greatly from her staff. Partly because there was a feeling as if the tensions chef A describes don't feel as dire as what some of her employees may describe. While she refers to their experiences every now and then, it is clear that she does not want to reproduce the hierarchies within our conversation. Unfortunately, I was not able to meet with anyone she employs. Importantly, as a prominent chef in London, chef A is particularly careful in creative a narrative around her business, just as she wishes to do around her heritage and recipes. Some questions I asked were met with almost revised responses that would circulate back to her cookbooks or restaurant – it was clear I was not speaking just to the person, but a chef conducting business. Additionally, as our conversation took place over Zoom, there were sensorial observations that were missing that contributed to a more rounded discussion as with other interviews.

Both chefs are also performing a responsibility of representation – of their respective businesses and as South Asian chefs. Although chef B does not feel as rehearsed in her responses, her business utilises the powerful narratives of home and belonging and similar to making a passion her job, there is a sense these narratives she ruminates on have become part of a professional mediation. There are other themes that require greater research and attention – hostility and hospitality in the South Asian diaspora, a more in-depth look at domestic cooking at home and cooking in restaurants, and an opportunity to engage with the chefs that work for chef A. While some conversations invite other research prospective, there are invaluable findings that move this thesis forward.

In this chapter and through my conversations with chef A and B, I want to emphasise how malleable food is as identities are being understood, transformed, and challenged. I have critiqued what 'belonging' means through its normative political projects, which generally champions inclusion, and instead argued for an affective understanding where solidarity and identity is built, understood, and importantly, progressive. As Massey argues, an anti-essentialist understanding of place, where we think of how places can be seen, challenges a 'timeless authenticity' (Massey, 2007). Chef A and B do not focus on one place, but a myriad of places like Brixton Market, restaurants, or wherever chef B hosts a supper club – these spaces embody a practice of placemaking, even when that place shifts. These businesses, however, are not without their own internal hierarchies and concerns of class – they stand apart from their curry house counterparts, offering food at much higher prices. Yet, they circulate within their ambivalence of personal and professional cultural identities.

Through the infused relation of food, nostalgia, and identity, these interviews reflect an ambivalent state as an ongoing process. There is detachment from problematic notions of

gendered labour and patriarchy reproduced in the preparation and consumption of food, while there is attachment to the pleasure of food itself. However, it is crucial to note, detachment from domestic responsibilities was expected growing up for both chefs. Again, there is a sense of taking place elsewhere – in other careers – that was nurtured but not without a recognition in the difference of class and status in their respective homes. Similarly, there are instances of detachment – from isolation in London to practising attachment to a community where the kitchen is re-established as a place of solidarity. As emphasised, the participants in this research are from diverse and different backgrounds, who all have unique experiences in London and relationship to place and home. In the following and final chapter, I bring together the running themes that best addressed the tensions put forward in this study. To reiterate – how do South Asian women in London articulate their belonging? As I have attempted to demonstrate through this study, belonging is a practice, articulated in moments, and experienced while working through the ambivalence of identity, home, culture, heritage, and more. These moments are context and situation dependent, and importantly, a reflection of one's positionality.

6 Conclusion – Reimagining Belonging through Food

I began this research with a simple format of question and answer. How can the sense of belonging for South Asian women in London be improved? In this early endeavour, I wanted to highlight the racial, gendered, and class dynamics that impact a sense of belonging and find out ways and practices to overcome such realities. I began with a similar sense of optimism that I have aimed to describe throughout the thesis – the desire to reach a conclusion, a destination, an answer. Throughout the thesis I dwelled in the complexities, the differences, tensions, and the ambivalences because that is what belonging means to the participants – it is not a description, but rather a conflict of emotions. In this concluding chapter, I want to reframe the puzzle and question I began with – why and how the desire for belonging persists is a measure of working towards a good life. It is not under what conditions can belonging be improved, rather, how belonging is articulated in spaces and moments, through the everyday activity of preparing, consuming, and sharing food. This chapter does not provide a neat conclusion or summary of the politics of belonging but argues for the understanding of belonging to remain elastic, best articulated by each participant through practice, negotiations, and ambivalence. This practice, as I have found, can be through commensality, finding solidarity in networks, or through the daily practices of cooking and finding pleasure in one's meal. Reimaging Belonging is to question 'belonging to' a particular location as these locations are not fixed. Reimagining belonging is to question nostalgia as places and identity transform and evolve. Reimaging Belonging is to question belonging to a state, as a 'status' can be precarious. Belonging is to recognise a sense of cruel optimism, which can be met with ambivalence and solidarity, and creating counter-spaces of belonging. Reimaging belonging is to reframe the distance between the emotional, cultural, and the political states of being.

Reimaging Belonging – Reframing the Question

As I stated, the initial research question was to probe a sense of belonging for South Asian women in London. My interest in the subject of belonging started from a personal struggle of home. I am considered a 'third-culture kid', having been raised outside of my parents' culture and country. I was curious how people found and felt at home – especially if we are likely to be more mobile now, or as Massery offers, in 'spatial upheaval' – live in multiple places or be without family or friends in our immediate geography. I had come to this research with a bias – that we were all striving to belong. The questions have evolved throughout the thesis, and I have explored what belonging is and why do we crave it? Why is this craving salient in diasporic communities? How is belonging politicised? In this thesis, I have demonstrated how the participants in this research consider their belonging. Importantly, I wanted to emphasis the way in which their positionality impacts their experience and, therefore, their sense of belonging.

I have purposefully avoided providing a definition of belonging – there are moments in which political belonging and national belonging are employed, and in other moments, participants have described their emotional belonging. It was most clear in my interview with Southall Black Sisters – the inherent and most visible tension between having a legal and

political status (access to passport, the right to remain and more) that has a direct impact on their sense of comfort and home in London. This points to Yuval-Davis's theorisation of belonging as acting differently – the emotional state, which is politicised when belonging feels under threat. In the thesis, I demonstrated how these different states – political, emotional – of belonging are overlapping for those of a diaspora, yet the way they are experienced in the everyday differs for each individual. Therefore, 'belonging' is an all-encompassing emotion that is political, national, emotional often all at the same time.

In chapter 2, I synthesised the current literature to provide an overview of the politics of belonging. As I argue for a more nuanced and elastic understanding of belonging, I relied on the works of Yuval-Davis, Avtar Brah, Anita Mannur, Vijay Mishra, and other scholars to assemble crucial texts as it relates to belonging, diaspora, and food. As I found with all my interviews, conversations that may not directly address belonging are still circulating the subject. Therefore, a number of disciplines offer a unique perspective of the politics of belonging distilled through law, geography, sociology, and more. What I aimed to demonstrate in this chapter were necessary concepts that were relevant for the following case studies. Therefore, this chapter was a recognition of how belonging may be commonly theorised, but especially how belonging is understood in the everyday for South Asian women in London. I examined the politics of diaspora to offer a greater understanding of why belonging is political, a longing, and how it persists in a hostile environment. As the scholars I cite in this chapter suggest, diaspora is a condition in which an individual negotiates with their multilayered identity. In this process, nationality and belonging are threatened – the diaspora navigates what and where home is. I argue that the condition of diaspora is a recognition of a sense of loss, while negotiating multiple identities, in the attempt to find comfort in a given space and time. As Avtar Brah offers, diaspora is not just about a push and pull of two places but can be about multiple sites of home and place. South Asian migration, for all the participants, cannot be separated from a legacy of colonialisation. Making a home in what was previously the heart of a vast empire saw a continuation of subjugation of being othered – racist encounters in diasporic heavy neighbourhoods of Southall and East Ham to policies that directly impacted and controlled migration – the 'good' versus the 'bad' migrant – which influenced everyday life.

In this chapter, I argued beyond fidelity and towards a singular membership. To do so, I traced moments of migration, assimilation, and multiculturalism that make up the political debate on immigration in the UK. In studying belonging and diaspora, we can see how boundaries are made beyond the borders of a national territory but also within the spaces of London. It is in this chapter I stress the importance of power not only as a dynamic between 'diaspora' and the 'British' but within the diasporas themselves. The intersecting positionalities influence and impact the space one can occupy. In moments of fragmentation, hostility, racism, sexism, and everyday violence, belonging to a place became more vulnerable.

A response to such conditions is dependent on an individual's positionality and how the state regulates and maintains power in the everyday. Therefore, the response was varied – from assimilation to British society, supressing a connection to heritage, to having security in

paperwork, or celebrating cultural connections to the homeland – these are not simple expressions of one or the other but a complex feeling that is negotiated in everyday moments from choosing what to wear to preparing a meal for oneself or their families. As a participant from the SBS meeting confirms, the lack of control of her own space and mobility in London tests her sense of belonging to the city. While, participant AC, began to readjust with what belonging in the country means by exchanging her Indian passport for a British one. These experiences are understood through this chapters' review of concepts of diaspora, loss, multiculturalism, and more.

The difference of positionality is what drives this research forward and where I introduced food as both a tool that can flatten a diaspora through cuisine but also be an expression of a heritage. Through food, the participants make use of space – the kitchen, a restaurant, a neighbourhood, a meeting – as a place of resilience, a counter-space of belonging. And food itself can be a progressive marker of hybridity. By understanding the complexity of people, place, and food, I suggest we can reimagine a sense of belonging.

This chapter, therefore, aimed to highlight how convoluted a concept such as belonging is for the South Asian diaspora in London, and why there is no one singular definition However, belonging persists because a sense of belonging is a practice, felt in moments. As the later chapters developed, unpacking diaspora continued to be a foundation for which to understand how the participants articulate their belonging in the UK.

Reimaging Belonging – Lessons from the Case Studies

At the start of the case study chapters, I explain the importance of the place, or in the case of the chefs, their profession. Place, space, and food are vital to the practice of belonging, as demonstrated by the literature review, and as articulated by the participants. As the importance of positionality and difference has driven the study forward, the case studies also offer an opportunity to examine these by focusing on the experience of two participants in each chapter – AC and EG, SH and FN, and Chef A and Chef B. While there is certainly an element of comparison in each chapter, their responses are more a reflection of how their different positionalities experience and consider belonging – importantly, how these may even overlap. The case studies untangled, as best as possible, the practice of belonging, the ambivalence that it raises, the importance of positionality in the everyday experience, and the role of food, if any, that all contribute to the desire for a good life.

Our case studies began with eating at a South Asian restaurant with two participants, interrogating their feelings towards London, the UK and home food. I mapped their responses in relation to literature and scholarship on belonging and found the focus of our political conversations prioritise a hierarchy of identities – who is a migrant, expat, illegal, good, bad, deserving. Such rhetoric relies heavily on the debate of inclusion and exclusion – however, this reinforces a 'right' and 'proper' fit required as both are dependent on the other. To be included, someone must be excluded. Academic discourse considers what it means to live with difference – a multicultural question of conviviality. I further these conversations to argue that the affective nature of belonging is a space of tension, inconsistencies, and

emphasised the role that food has in experiencing, in the moment, any which identity that an individual espouses.

My lunch with AC and EG confirmed such ambivalences towards which identity fits the space they are in – for AC, it was the debate between eating South Asian food at her place of work and asking for time off for Diwali. For EG, it was thinking of her identity as a self-construction, not a given within the confines of her split White-British family or Punjabi-Indian family expect. For AC, her identity and belonging are a balancing act of obtaining British citizenship, and losing her Indian passport was a signifier of an identity that is lost in a manner of speaking but practised through food rituals. For EG, identity and belonging are fluid and flexible – the moments of ambivalence aren't met with a resolution, but rather, a recognition that there is a sense of discomfort that is being felt, which she observes before carrying on with the everyday.

Both these participants offer a different point of view as belonging to the South Asian diaspora in the UK. AC maintains a struggle of defining home, while EG does not think of home as the UK, but the city where she grew up. Yet, as the chapter on diaspora suggests, food does not flatten the experiences but allows for them to attach and detach nostalgia and meaning as they see fit.

In the following chapter, I reflected on my own experiences through a sensorial exploration of Southall. I deliberated on the building of a community in a space of empire by a diaspora, and the nostalgia that adheres to a sense of loss while making place for a hybrid community. While belonging is a practice, it is equally an emotion, and in this chapter, I think of how this emotion is felt through the senses of sight, sound, smell, taste of a diasporic neighbourhood and its street food. I reflected on my own positionality as a researcher, a member of the diaspora, and as a woman conducting this research. I aimed to construct a narrative of tension to demonstrate how complex the subject of belonging is by walking through the Southall high street. Importantly, as I do not offer a singular definition of belonging, the first half of this chapter allowed me to highlight how a sense of belonging is literally experienced through our senses.

The complexity of belonging, diaspora, gender, and class is furthered by the focus group with Southall Black Sisters. The spaces of Southall depict a history of violence and struggle, but it is in the focus group that these struggles are realised in the everyday. The women I interviewed have greater boundaries placed on their mobility compared to other participants in this research. Their precarious status within the British state challenges the optimism that migration and the absence of domestic violence brought. One of the major takeaways from this focus group informed the revision of the research question. Women who migrated recently felt a greater sense of belonging in London versus those who had migrated over 10 or 20 years ago. As covered in chapter 2, Berlant's understanding of cruel optimism helped explain some of the persistence towards a political belonging. For women in this focus group, the state yields power to grant certain rights – the security of employment, of a home, and even control of their own passports – these basic rights are often denied or strictly managed that reinforces an attachment to the British state or, of abusive relationships that are tied to their belonging to the country. With time, many promises by the state remained unmet,

threatening a sense of belonging that women could feel or practice. Yet, in their moments of 'impasse', many were able to find alternative routes to a sense of belonging through the solidarity and political community found at SBS. However, their ambivalence towards their belonging is a negotiation of working within a framework of the state to access rights, and the subversion of what political belonging means by attaching themselves to a political community at SBS.

Importantly, while food is central to the practice of belonging elsewhere, in this chapter, food does not hold the same capacity of promising hybridity. While this was mostly due to limited time during the meeting, it was also a visible indication of difference between those who do not have the very basic of political or legal belonging to the country. Their experience of hybridity, identity, and food differ greatly and is something that requires more time and research to unpack.

Belonging through Food

In the final case study, food is celebrated as a marker of heritage and a revitalised sense of authority for chef A and B in the kitchen. In this chapter, I focused on food more closely from a gendered perspective, and importantly, by women in the industry who analysed and made sense of their position in the London food landscape. To build on previous conversations with EG and AC, who comment on authenticity and culinary appropriation, I emphasised food is not apolitical, nor is belonging through food a consistent or pleasurable activity. Food is a visceral consumption, representation, and symbol of nationality, diaspora, heritage, and labour. The chefs in this chapter described their rejection of cooking as women who initially maintained a distance towards gendered chores, to eventually making food their business. Their distance came with a privilege of others in their household being able to perform this labour, yet it also was a liberation of their own careers prior to their careers in hospitality.

In this chapter, I critically engaged with food as an expression of culture, heritage, and nation as well as a gendered labour. In both instances, there is great ambivalence towards food as 'authentically' South Asian, as well as the duty of women who carry their culture and tradition forward. However, as these chefs assert, food allows them to be creative, assertive, and unpack the narratives of heritage beyond a simplified commodification of food. Instead, they paid attention to the gendered inequalities or the lesser-known parts of history, both in the South Asian and British context.

Moving beyond the chefs' individual relationships with food, I also examined the environment they create in offering commensality for their diners or those who attend their supper clubs. While I have titled this 'Belonging through Food', it should be emphasised that the evidence from this research points to 'moments' of belonging. It is in the 'moments' of dining where the chefs expressed their identity quite literally through meals that are punctuated with stories. As such, the place where belonging is practised may shift and change, and the food along with it, but this is a representation of roots without being rooted.

Food can be a powerful vehicle to recollect a past, find pleasure in the present, and imagine a progressive future. However, this is only managed by working through the ambivalences of

each person, place, and food. Food, as argued, can subvert, and reimagine gendered labour, but it also depends on the individual and whether they are in a position to do so. For AC, EG, and the chefs, food was a practice that created new attachments. For SH, FN, and the other SBS participants, the food present at their monthly meetings was a moment of commensality, practicing political and emotional solidarity with one another.

Conclusion – Belonging for Contemporary South Asian women in London.

To conclude, I want to take forward Berlant's argument of cruel optimism and rethink what the politics of belonging means to sustain our attachments. Belonging is about the positive just as much as it is about the negative feelings – Berlant suggests we redistribute and re-appropriate these emotions as a form of resistance (Anderson *et al.*, 2023). The mundane acts may even appear apolitical, however, as I have argued, the eating and the act of commensality are rarely without their own power geometries, with the ability to incite affective, internal dissent and change.

> The formation of our identity is not only determined by the dominant power, but also by our capacity and strategy to work on our creative self-formation (a new register) without being swallowed up by the given power relations' (Aryal, 2020).

This thesis cannot definitively map all the moments of ambivalence or conflict because that would require undoing complexity and replacing it with certainty. The politics of belonging must remain elastic to account for the complicated, contradicting, positive, negative, and in-between experiences that occur in the everyday. In addition to ambivalence, there are two concepts discussed in this thesis that I want to further – third-space and dwelling. Third-space is the encounter where something new is created all together, a place from where resistance begins, as Bhabha writes. Similar to bell hooks' use of 'margins', it is where important detachment can take shape through attachments formed elsewhere. For some participants, this is how they think of food as an encounter of places that are imbued with meaning – of streets in South Asia, marketplaces in London, their family kitchens, and more. For others at SBS, it is the meeting space where they practice a form of political solidarity, and emotional belonging. The third-space, whatever shape it takes, is where an individual can dwell – a place of comfort, however momentary it may be, but a place nonetheless of relations and attachments that people maintain – a counter-space of belonging. The politics of belonging for South Asian women in London, and the formation of identity for these participants is, I argue, contingent on moments of ambivalence, where they can find a third-space from which to dwell.

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