MUSLIMAH: DECOLONISING AND RE-PRESENTING CONTEMPORARY BRITISH CINEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF BLACK MUSLIM WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Much discussion has surrounded the notion of decolonisation,[1] particularly in the context of education, which calls for a widening of study texts to include creators and writers of colour. Organisations such as The Black Curriculum Project (Stennett, 2019) seek to broaden representation of the racialised other within education (Arday and Mirza, 2018); meanwhile in media and the creative industries, the reproduction of 'reactive tropes' at the hands of 'industry lore' is also being challenged (Saha, 2018). Alongside these discussions, particularly in the creative industries, are explorations into how far the reverberations of a previously colonised world manifest themselves in our creation, understanding and absorption of art (Lorde, 2018).

With these questions in mind, this thesis postulates a dearth of Black Muslim women in British narrative cinema, theorising alongside cultural and critical race scholarship, to interpret culturally dominant representations of the 'other' on screen. It merges issues of both *seeing* and *showing* with regards to representation, and posits the value of conscious spaces in which to rehearse an interrogated, theoretical undoing of long-established colonial ideologies (Young, 1996, pp.183-184), conversing with the notion of decolonisation in the process.

In the spirit of Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives* (2019) in literature and *Fairview* (Drury, 2018) in theatre, this study rehearses a decolonised approach to (screen)writing, theorising the conscious undoing of colonial gaze when representing the Black Muslim woman on screen.

[1] The term 'decolonisation' is used here and throughout this thesis as "a means to uncover erased or hidden histories" pertaining to "racialised Black or Brown or othered" identities. (Adebisi 2021)

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

In 1979 Audre Lorde delivered the speech that would eventually become the book of essays, *The Master's Tool Cannot Destroy the Masters House* (2008), which includes discussion of how, in terms of writing, the status quo can be challenged – not solely by content, but also by using form and structure in a way that is more consciously influenced by 'positionality'[1] (Qin, 2016, p.1-2). Lorde, a Black, lesbian and feminist poet, and marginalised identity in terms of the establishment, gave the speech as part of 'The Second Sex – Thirty Years Later'[2] conference at the New York University Institute for the Humanities. Whilst there, Lorde:

> …condemned the conference for its limited range of speakers, its substance, its very structure. Lorde examined the ramifications of failing to include others as equals. For in failing to do so, the conference had employed the same tools of oppression over others that the participants deplored in the politics of patriarchy. Lorde challenged the conference participants, who presumably understood that de Beauvoir had represented woman as the "other" to man, to examine the implications of depicting "other" races, sexualities, ages, and economic classes. (Olson, 2000, p.260)

Lorde "wanted to transform the uses of power, not reproduce them ironically in the process of protesting them" (Olson, p.262), and in doing so, she raised a question that inspired and informs this thesis: "What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?" (Lorde, 2018, p.17) In terms of storytelling in British cinema, representation through presence (inclusion), still exists within the confines of a form built by, for and within the context of colonialism. Using this as a starting point, I would like to explore what it could look like to write a consciously decolonised screenplay, by pulling apart the master's house in my mind, brick by brick.

Gaining traction in academic consciousness since 2015, particularly since the 'Rhodes Must Fall' protest movement at the university of Cape Town[3], there has been much talk of

[1] Positionality is defined here and throughout the thesis as the practice of delineating one's own position in relation to study, "with the implication that this position may influence aspects of the study, such as the data collected or the way in which it is interpreted" (Qin, D, 2016, pp.1-2).

[2] Commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir (Olsen, 2000).

[3] The 'Rhodes Must Fall' protest movement began on the 9th March 2015, and was originally directed against a statue at the University of Cape Town commemorating Cecil Rhodes, Prime Minister of South Africa from 1890

decolonisation (Adebisi, 2021), particularly that of decolonising education (Arday and Mirza, 2018). It has since evolved in use more broadly, involving different disciplines, arenas, interpretations and aims. It remains a contested term, consisting of a "heterogeneity of viewpoints, approaches, political projects and normative concerns" (Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancıoğlu, 2018, p.1). As explained in *Decolonising the University,* "This multiplicity of perspectives should not be surprising given the various historical and political sites of decolonisation that span both the globe and 500 years of history" (Bhambra, Gebrial, and Nişancıoğlu, 2018, p.1). With regards to the rising popularity of the term in academia and higher education institutions, its use speaks to the stasis of a white canon from which knowledge is stemmed and informed, and calls for widening the variety of texts taught to students at varying levels of education to include creators and writers of colour (Stennett, 2019).

In terms of writing, and more specifically, literature, 'postcolonial' as a genre has been a means to define and differentiate work that is positioned away from a white literary canon and which is informed by societies separate from colonial whiteness. As Ato Quayson describes for the British Academy (2020):

> A possible working definition for postcolonialism is that it involves a studied engagement with the experience of colonialism and its past and present effects, both at the local level of ex-colonial societies and at the level of more general global developments thought to be the after-effects of empire. Postcolonialism often also involves the discussion of experiences such as slavery, migration, suppression and resistance, difference, race, gender and place as well as responses to the discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy, anthropology and linguistics. (Quayson, 2020)

'Decolonising' offers a further differentiation: it is an attempt at *undoing* an element of the structures unmasked by postcolonialism. It is an idea that builds on postcolonialism to interrogate the manner and landscape in which writing unfolds and exists, asking questions about style and form itself and how far a previously colonised world has played a part in how

to 1896 and involved in the British South Africa Company, which acquired Rhodesia and Zambia as British territories. The campaign for the statue's removal received global attention and led to a wider movement to decolonise education across South Africa (Fairbanks, 2015).

we create, understand and absorb art (Lorde, 2008). For the purposes of this study, I use the term in this way – to disrupt "the ways of seeing, listening, thinking and making in order to drive cultural, social and institutional change" (UAL Decolonising Arts Institute, 2022). I must acknowledge here that the use of the term in this way, which myself and many other scholars have adopted, has been previously disputed. In Eve Tuck and Wayne K. Yang's article, *'Decolonisation is not a metaphor'* they argue:

> Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. The easy adoption of decolonizing discourse by educational advocacy and scholarship, evidenced by the increasing number of calls to "decolonize our schools," or use "decolonizing methods," or, "decolonize student thinking", turns decolonization into a metaphor. As important as their goals may be, social justice, critical methodologies, or approaches that decenter settler perspectives have objectives that may be incommensurable with decolonization. Because settler colonialism is built upon an entangled triad structure of settler-native-slave, the decolonial desires of white, non-white, immigrant, postcolonial, and oppressed people, can similarly be entangled in resettlement, reoccupation, and reinhabitation that actually further settler colonialism. The metaphorization of decolonization makes possible a set of evasions, or "settler moves to innocence", that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity. (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p.1)

This particular journal piece was written a decade ago, before the term took a firm hold within Black and cultural studies. It has engendered responses, such as the article 'Slavery is a Metaphor: A Critical Commentary on Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor*"*'(Garba and Sorentino, 2020), which draws on scholarship in Black studies to offer "a critical analysis of the metaphysical and methodological presuppositions" in the essay. Garba and Sorentino argue that:

> their critique of metaphor entails the collapse of the triad into a settler-native dyad, the reduction of slavery to forced labour, and a division between the

> material and the symbolic that forecloses not only an analysis of slavery, but also the constitution of settler colonialism itself. (p.764)

Tuck and Yang published a further article of the same name, in Spanish 'La descolonización no es una metáfora (decolonisation is not a metaphor)' (2021, pp.61-11), which indicates that dialogue surrounding the term is ongoing. The use and meaning of decolonisation, whilst still a subject of debate, is used throughout this thesis in the context of a conscious undoing of colonisation – an interrogation of an imposed 'status quo'.

To expand on the use of 'status quo' here, I refer to Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor's use of 'structural racism', as quoted in the *New Left Review 132* essay, 'Structures of Oppression: Querying Analogies of Race and Caste' (Bag and Watkins, 2021, pp.52-82). As Bag and Watkins note:

> Taylor doesn't use the notion of caste but that of structural or institutional racism, coined by Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton in *Black Power* (1967). She defines structural racism in consequentialist terms: as the public or private—state or economic—processes that result in 'greater rates of poverty, dispossession, criminalization and mortality' for African-Americans. The problem is therefore situated not at the level of intentions but at the level of the outcomes of the economic and social processes as a whole; […] If this remains very general, it contains a truth occluded by the 'post-racial' ideology that is one of Taylor's main targets, and which holds that 'bad treatment on the basis of race' is a matter of individual attitudes or a lapse in personal behaviour—to be dealt with, as Angela Davis puts it, by further doses of diversity and inclusion. Taylor[4] writes: 'The oppression of Black workers exposes the foundational lie of the U.S. as a free and democratic society—their rebellion brings that lie to the surface for all to see, throwing into question the actual nature of US society.'" (2021, pp. 78-79)

The notion of an imposed 'status quo' in terms of its effects on othered identities is explored in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon, 1986). In describing psychological

[4] Referring to Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor in, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (2016).

experiences, he identifies the trauma of being objectified as well as 'situational neurosis' in the ontological destabilising of the self (p.60). When imposed racialised stereotypes often serve as the only societal mirror to an other's understanding of themselves amongst the pecking order of the world, a driving force surrounding the desire for decolonisation is created— seeking to undo the trauma of seeing one's identity misrepresented, assumed, assigned or ignored.
Alongside challenging 'Western gaze' in terms of representing othered identities, Foluke Adebisi presents the need, also, for decolonisation as a means of interrogating, understanding and compiling intellectual histories which reflect approaches that look beyond that which has been previously deemed intellectually worthy in Western/ Anglophone contexts (Adebisi, 2021).

Contemporary examples of writing that could be argued to utilise 'different tools', putting Lorde's theories into practice, are the theatre play *Fairview* (Drury, 2018), as an examination of disassembling 'otherness', and Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives* (2019). Both examples break free of how stories are *supposed* to be told, with a reclamation of intimacy with the subject and positioning of the lens. It should be noted here that this study is not merely about experimenting with form, it is about interrogating form from a position of undoing racialised contraints. The screenplay element of this thesis, *Shedding*, explores the notion of unlearning the formal, Western gaze of storytelling (Shohat, 1991) whilst also interrogating the structure of works as prescribed for the screen**.** In terms of 'diverse' representation, identity itself is so often the conflict at the heart of Western/ Anglophone storytelling. That is to say, the 'otherness' against the 'normal' is the basis for the narrative conflict. In *Shedding*, I explore what it looks like to both centre that identity conflict, and then dismantle it. My hope is that removing it will shed a form of constraining status quo that hinders other options for decolonised narratives and styles to flourish.

This study's theoretical parameters will be demonstrated, firstly, through an examination of fictional Muslim women characters in British cinema, focusing on the presence and/or absence of the Black Muslim woman. The work endeavours to identify the terms of the presence of this identity through a Western lens, investigating theoretical reasoning by separating and analysing the representation of Black women and the representation of Muslim women as two individual strands. It will then apply this to a (screen)written work which demonstrates a process of showing and unravelling gaze, or, as the title suggests, *Shedding*. The research comprises two elements, theory and practice, which converse with each other throughout the process in an effort to create a 'consciously oppositional' (hooks, 2003) work of screenwriting as a response in critical dialogue with the theoretical findings.

As a screenwriter[5], I am well-versed in the accepted codes and conventions of the mainstream script. In order to truly interrogate the process, as a Black, Muslim woman, I feel the subject of the narrative should be familiar to my experience. My autoethnographic approach to the screenplay is also to assist in crafting an identity conflict imposed on the narrative, mirroring, as Adebisi notes, the fact that: "postcolonial afterlives of the empire still find otherness the narrative conflict" (2021). It is a form of conscious undoing for myself as a writer and creator, with decolonial objectives away from 'otherness' as the narrative conflict, as is often found in postcolonial storytelling. Part of my conscious opposition here, is to release the constraints of purging and flogging an ethnic/ racial identity in crisis against its environment. I seek to explore and apply the idea of rejecting the notion of 'otherness', as understood by the status quo that imposes it. Centring the Black Muslim woman allows me to re-present intersecting identities with a complexity that furthers a 'narrow Anglophone gaze' (Adebisi, 2021). This thesis, therefore, is particularly interested in what happens when 'otherness' is not the main conflict in a fictional narrative; exploring the extent of 'otherness' as the sole conflict in existing British cinematic representations of Muslim women on the whole, and how this may play a part in the (lack of prominent) representation of Black Muslim women. Otherness requires an existence of and opposition to a non-other, or a 'normal'/ status quo. Otherness has a dependent relationship with non-otherness, where the non-other dominates and dictates the 'other' according to its own position as the status quo. This thesis asks, can otherness be rejected? Can that interconnection be severed? What might that look like and what would being conscious in the process mean in the formation of a screenplay? These are all questions I hope to explore across this study.

Thesis Map

This thesis begins with a Literature Review, opening with the questions: 'who is the Black Muslim Woman in British cinema and how has she been constructed within the landscape of cultural imagination?' The first chapter serves as an overview of the main intellectuals used to develop my deconstructive approach. I discuss the work of Audre Lorde, Frantz Fanon, John Berger, Stuart Hall, Lola Young and Valerie Smith (amongst others). Chapter 1 also presents the intentions for my screenplay, as well as postulating Womanism as a compatible theoretical framework for my creative practice.

[5] Biography available at: https://theagency.co.uk/the-clients/naida-redgrave/

Chapter 2 outlines the purpose and parameters of my study and details the manner in which the research has been approached and undertaken. I describe how I intended the theoretical exploration to merge with my practice and further refine the specific research aims and avenues to be explored. Within Chapter 2, I will also discuss the screenwriting process, first establishing the initial aims of the project, then describing of the process of building and incorporating theory into the final version of the screenplay.

In Chapter 3, I enter deeper analysis into the Muslim woman as represented on screen. The chapter is organised into two sections; the first explores the representation of Muslim women characters by analysing a selection of case studies. The second part of the chapter offers an overview of the features that have marked representations of the Black woman in British contemporary culture. The chapter closes with a series of considerations that may explain the dearth of Black Muslim female characters in British cinema over the last two decades.

The findings of my analysis – the identification of specific constructions of the Muslim woman as an identity – provide the starting point for the deconstructive process of 'shedding' in the practice component, my script in Chapter 4. Finally, I conclude with a summarising of the thesis, offering thoughts on further study, with closing comments on the notion of a 'decolonised' (screen)writing process.

CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis asks: '*who* is the Black Muslim Woman in British cinema and *how* has she been conceived within the landscape of cultural imagination?' These questions have led to: '*where* is the Black woman in British cinema?' and *'why* is there a dearth in the presence and characterisation of this particular identity?'

In exploring the above, I do not seek to reach a position of new socio-historical analysis. This thesis does not seek to delve into the socio-historic reasons for the (re)presentation of this identity in a manner which aims to comment on or analytically unearth new reasonings for the way Black Muslim women are represented. Rather, the main purpose of my work is to anchor an understanding of what this identity looks like through a colonised lens. To do so, I use theorists who critique colonial representations of 'othered' identities – so that I may build an understanding of what *opposition* to this colonised viewpoint could look like. In other words, in order to attempt a decolonised representation of this identity as a writer at a text level – to remove and shed the layers of this imposed gaze – a foundational, theoretical understanding of this gaze's nature and function is first required. An understanding of what is being opposed and undone needs to first be reached. This chapter presents an overview of the main intellectuals I relied upon in order to develop my deconstructive approach.

1.1 Audre Lorde

My interest in Audre Lorde, particularly in terms of my identity as a Black, woman writer, has served as a point of contact from which my research interests have evolved. The relevance of Lorde's work in this thesis lies in the idea of (self-)representing 'othered' experiences, or as Lorde explains: *"*If I didn't define myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive*"* (Lorde, 1982). Lorde here expresses the practice of self-defining and exploring her own experience as a Black, lesbian, activist, poet and writer, and thus practising a "centering on Black women's experiences and analyzing those experiences via intersectional paradigms" (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 41). I use the term intersectionality here as defined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, who explores multiplicity in social identities and the ensuing multi-layered levels of power disadvantage (2017). These are key theoretical areas that closely relate to my exploration of the inherently intersectional, Black and Muslim woman.

1.2 Frantz Fanon

The explorative weaving of my project back and forth brings in historical works on race and identity with a keen interest in forming a psychologically informed context – as an 'othered' identity myself, the draw towards a practice as outlined in this thesis, is not accidental. This conscious opposition to colonial representation that I seek to rehearse and explore is a purposeful act that can be explained and understood through a theoretical understanding of the psychopathological effects of colonial racism, as presented by Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986), and also frequently explored autoethnographically by writer and activist James Baldwin. Whilst the creative element of this thesis does not seek to be directly autoethnographic, the refining of the parameters of study, attuning the area of focus towards Black Muslim women specifically as opposed to Muslim women more generally, arose from noticing a dearth of this particular identity on screen in British cinema, alongside repeatedly resurfacing tropes in the on-screen presence of the Muslim woman. My own identity no doubt influenced my noticing the dearth of Black, female, Muslim characters, and the resurfacing tropes concerning the present representations of Muslim women suggests the issue is not solely one of inclusion (or lack of). The notion of imposed or misrepresented racial and ethnic identity has been explored for over half a century (at least), notably in the 1952 publication of *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon, 1986). The work applies an interdisciplinary approach to the study of race and colonialism, combining psychology[6], philosophy (in particular existential humanism), and use of Marxism as a theoretical framework, in order to formulate, what was at the time, considered a 'radical analysis' (Dini, p.31).

Fanon asserts that colonial racism has psychopathological effects, with one of the main causes, resulting from the native culture of a colonised people being replaced by the narrative of a colonising power. 'Replaced' here can also be interpreted as omission, mis-representation, or in the controlling of representational narratives. This replacement prevents the colonised from developing a sense of identity, which Fanon explains to have psychological effects on development (Fanon, 1986, p.118). This development is not solely limited to an individual's psychological understanding of themselves, but has repercussions into wider societal, socio(economic) development. Fanon used Marxism[7] to show and predict that colonial racism would incur long-term socio-economic disparity, whilst also utilising the work of Jacques

[6] Fanon utilises theories from French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (Dini, 2017, p.20)
[7] An analytic approach to social economic questions developed by Karl Marx.

Lacan[8] "to show that colonialism shapes the world view of its citizens, from their earliest years of development" (Dini, p.11). At a similar time of the publication of *Black Skin, White Masks*, and supporting this idea of the affects of colonial racism from a young age, was the experiment 'The Doll Tests' (Brown vs. Board) which concluded in the 50s.

> Psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark designed and conducted a series of experiments known colloquially as "the doll tests" to study the psychological effects of segregation on African-American children. "Drs. Clark used four dolls, identical except for color, to test children's racial perceptions. Their subjects, [African-American] children between the ages of three to seven, were asked to identify both the race of the dolls and which color doll they prefer. A majority of the children preferred the white doll and assigned positive characteristics to it. The Clarks concluded that "prejudice, discrimination, and segregation" created a feeling of inferiority among African-American children and damaged their self-esteem. (NAACP, 2020)

Rather than set out to prove colonial racism, Fanon identifies the trauma and psychological violence of being racially objectified as well as the psychopathological effects of experiencing racism, discussing how it contributes towards a state of destabilisation (Fanon, 1986, pp.141-209). What I take from here is two-fold; firstly, Fanon's assertive standpoint with regards to the parameters of study, and secondly, the building on autoethnographic knowledge to further move along conversation and pedagogy of the subject. To address the first point – just as Fanon does not (solely) seek to prove that racism exists, my work's focus is not a discussion concerning whether there are 'enough' representations of Black Muslim women in British cinema. It is not a study into demographics or percentages, because if it became that, it would distract from the further conversation I am seeking to have, concerning how, as writers, a decolonial approach may enhance the representing of othered identities. Or, as Toni Morrison articulates far more directly and eloquently:

> The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language and you spend twenty

[8] The French psychoanalyst.

> years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms, so you dredge that up. None of this is necessary. There will always be one more thing. (Morrison,1975)

In the British context, this is echoed in the work of the Black Audio Film Collective – more specifically in the collective's recourse to memory as explained by John Akomfrah[9]:

> The idea of memory seemed to me a way of posing questions to what one might call the official discourse. Because the official discourse insisted on narrativising black lives as migrant lives, insisted on treating black subjectivity as simply either criminal or pathological or sociological; there always seemed to be a category which came before you could get to that identity. And the recourse to memory was, for us, a way of sidestepping that. (Eshun and Sagar, 2007)

The second point, towards the furthering of conversation, is an area from which I develop a deeper understanding into the contextual landscape of 'otherness', however more so in terms of the experience as opposed to the functions of colonial racism. Understanding the destabilisation Fanon describes is important in order to reckon with the assimilation that takes place from early childhood, particularly by 'othered' identities, in order to fit in as much as possible with colonial expectations.[10] This destabilisation, much like "ontological insecurity", is a psychological distress informed by a "partial or almost complete absence of the assurances derived from an existential position" (Laing, 1960, p.39). In *Black Skin, White Masks,* Fanon explores the psychopathological effects that colonial racism causes, and presents the 'double-bind' that the 'oppressed' or colonized identity is forced into – that the only way to be considered human, is to 'act' white (1986). However, encounters with white people serve as a reminder that an other "can never be white," and therefore under colonialism, the other will

[9] Interview with John Akomfrah in '*The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of the Black Audio Film Collective*'. (Eshun and Sagar, 2007)

[10] I speak here as a Black writer, but this could just as easily extend to other aspects of one's personal identity – chemically straightening of Afro hair, for example.

live with this 'double-bind' and belief in their inferiority, with no means of rectifying the condition (Dini, 2017).

When imposed racialised stereotypes often serve as the only societal mirror to an 'other's' understanding of themselves amongst the pecking order of the world, and/ or when a racialised 'other' is ascribed limited parameters dictated by the cultural imagination, this ontological destabilisation occurs. This veer towards psychological impact, commencing with the notion of the ontological destabilising of the self, articulates a personal driving force with regards to (re)presenting 'othered' identities — a desire towards a conscious space in which to undo the trauma of seeing one's identity misrepresented, assumed, assigned or ignored.

1.3 Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe

This concept of a conscious space in which to rehearse decolonised representations is by no means new – the issue has been repeatedly articulated from a Black feminist standpoint. In a British (historical) context, this link between representation and identity leads towards a (re)claiming of space as an offering to resolve the sense of misrepresentation. First published in 1985, *Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* by Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, proposes that the soothing of the psychological effects of colonial racism lies within a conscious understanding of the self-defined, cultural self.

> To convey our sense of self, as Black women, we must first generate a positive understanding of the long cultural tradition which has fashioned our way of life here in Britain. […] The unique feature of our culture is that its root and base is Africa. To acknowledge its origins is also to identify the unchanging seam which is common to all Black cultures in the diaspora. Our African origin is the cornerstone of our lifestyle and our perception of the world, the internal dynamic which has enabled us continuously to resist new assaults on our way of life. In responding to these assaults we have had to create and recreate new definitions of ourselves as people. (2018, p.183)

What this illustrates is first an understanding of 'Black' in terms of a British feminist context – a cultural identification which understands the continent of Africa to be a place of origin, and secondly, that over twenty-five years ago, these conversations were taking place. The latter

serves as both an acknowledgment that this work is very much building from pre-existing ideas, and at the same time, allowing a further branch of questioning when pondering the dearth of Black Muslim women characters in British cinema. If the work towards self-defining Black womanhood in Britain has been in existence for at least a quarter of a century, is this identity's absence on screen explained by a lack of Black Muslim women in a position to self-define their identities in screenwriting? The definitive answer to this lies within a different type of study to this thesis, but it offers an additional rationale for my personal undertaking of the practice element – my screenplay exists as a response to a blind spot that matches my self-defined identity. This work serves to both 'create' and 'recreate' a new definition of the Black, Muslim woman.

1.4 John Berger and Stuart Hall

The Media Education Foundation's Stuart Hall collection series opens asking three questions: "Do media images help us understand how the world works? What kinds of images of Black people are we presented with? Who creates stereotypical images of Black people?" (Patierno and Talreja, 1997) The idea of meaning created through seeing, and masked ideologies within images, is widely understood in the Arts through John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (2008). Here Berger dissects the functions of object and subject, demonstrating how (placement of) images can instigate both subconscious and conscious meaning. Within this, Berger notes that "we only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice" (2008, p.8). Where one is told to look or what one is told to see may still involve a choice, however where Hall and Berger's work meets and forms a space from which my work converses, is that the meaning resulting from that choice is contained within the intentions of those directing one's attention.

Transferring the idea of seeing and power to the cultural imagination; that which society deciphers from images and representations, is defined by those determining the content, context and parameters of wider social narratives. To use Berger's theoretical basis here, when society is shown a particular aspect of an object (in this case, a selective/selected representation), not only is the full scope of the object being 'seen' removed, but the contextual meaning behind what is seen is pre-determined by a narrative that has already designated and decided how we decipher and interpret what is shown.

Where Western culture equates 'whiteness' with 'goodness' and reproduces Western knowledge as superior/ intellectually superior (Keele University, 2021)[11], to see then, an identity represented that is not white, informs the contextual process of 'seeing' that representation. Any additional tropes added to the presenting of that identity (as exampled by Lola Young later in this chapter) serve to reinforce the existing narrative: for instance, that 'whiteness' and 'Western' knowledge equates (intellectual) superiority. This reading offers a context to run alongside my line of questioning in this thesis, and also provides a more concrete basis in interpreting Lorde's articulation of the 'master's house' and 'the master's tools'. In the instance of cinematic representation[12], the house is the pre-existing narrative of white, Western 'intellectual superiority', and the tools are the cinematic tropes that reinforce this narrative.

To look more closely at this existing narrative, James Baldwin's work forthrightly names the injustice of racism and actively vocalizes anti-colonial ideas of expression (in *Dark Days* (2018), as one example). Baldwin frequently addressed the inaccuracy of the observing and retelling of the other, noting that it was not objective. Baldwin also stressed the damage this caused in every aspect of Black people's lives, from socio-economics to life expectancy (Baldwin and Peck, 2017). It is in this anti-colonial, decolonial space that this Literature Review resides and weaves, in its search for an approach and writing practice for a decolonial characterisation of the Black, Muslim woman.

1.5 Lola Young and Valerie Smith

To return now to the function and mechanics of seeing and power, with a contextualised understanding of anti-colonial study, as a means of challenging existing narratives of whiteness. I would like to re-integrate understandings of representations of Blackness on screen, in order to look towards the undertaking of decolonial (screen)writing as a practice. Writings on Black representations on screen have long documented the reproduction throughout history of certain (stereo)types "that run the gamut from indolent, subservient, buffoonish men and women, to vicious male rapists" (Smith, 1997, p.1). As expanded by Lola Young in *Fear of the Dark: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Cinema* (1996):

[11] 'Decolonising the curriculum' guide "intended for staff across Keele University to increase their understanding of decolonising the curriculum." (Keele University, 2021)
[12] 'Cinematic representation' here refers to the parameters of my study (British cinema, 2000 to 2020).

> There are elements of centuries old racialised discourses comprised of a set of assumptions about black people: black male sexuality as a threat to white womanhood and cultural superiority; black intellectual inferiority and fecklessness; and, derived from that, unmotivated irrational behaviour as the natural state of blackness… [in many] depictions of black people there are sets of values and attitudes towards 'race' and sexuality which have their roots in long-established ideologies. The traces of these ideologies are evident in film texts where black people are annihilated, criminilised and labelled as sexually deviant, and where sexual behaviour is monitored and regulated. The perceived threat is consistently contained or diminished by rendering black people invisible, infantile, desexualised or by eliminating black subjects from texts altogether. (Young, 1996, pp.183-184)

Cultural theorists however, have long warned against the framing of critique in this area to be one of 'right' and 'wrong' representation. As Valerie Smith explains in *Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video* (1997):

> Historically, black directors have considered [certain] types to be negative and, by extension, false representations of African Americans that threaten the lives and conditions of "real" black people. As a result, they have struggled to offer up alternative, truer representations of black life. To the extent that it seeks to replace "false" representations with positive, by extension "true" or "authentic" ones, the project of black film might thus be read as the search for an authentic black subject. (p.1)

The largest issue in trying to strive towards authenticity to achieve a 'correct' or 'right' way of representing identity, using Blackness as an example, is that there is no, one, single way to be Black. Furthermore, as Smith highlights, "it presupposes consensus about what a positive or negative (or authentic, for that matter) image actually is" (1997, p.3). As a writer, creating a (mis)represented identity carries pressure, particularly if the aim is to achieve authenticity – how does one create a Black Muslim female character that every Black Muslim woman can relate to as authentic? To attempt this would be tantamount to suggesting that all Black Muslim women are a homogenous group of a singular, shared experience. Black cultural criticism recognises this, with Smith noting that "although popular reactions may be influenced

excessively by the positive/ negative debate or discourses of authenticity, criticism of black visual culture in recent years has moved beyond this preoccupation." Smith goes on to reference Stuart Hall's impact in encouraging discourse towards concerns of diversity as opposed to aiming for "the homogeneity of Black experience" (1997, p.4). This is again echoed in the way John Akomfrah, of Black Audio Film Collective, talks about addressing a 'Black audience' in *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945-90* (Dickinson, 2019):

> One thing that we were very clear about was that there was no constituency for what we wanted to do. We didn't take for granted the assumption that there was a black audience for a black film. We ourselves having come from very diverse backgrounds knew that there were very different kinds of black people and we wanted to target and create a specific kind of interest group within black circles for a certain kind of film. (Dickinson, p.312)

Stuart Hall's chapter within *Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video* (Smith,1997) , 'What is this 'Black' in Black popular culture?'(1997, pp.123-133) builds on this rejection of a monolithic Black experience, challenging the idea of needing screen representations to feel 'truthful' to an authentic experience.

> Popular culture, commodified and stereotyped as it often is, is not at all, as we sometimes think of it, the arena where we find who we really are, the truth of our experience. It is an arena that is profoundly mythic. It is a theatre of popular desires, a theatre of popular fantasies. It is where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented, not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message, but to ourselves for the first time. (Hall, 1997, p.132)

Hall is speaking specifically to Black creators cultivating Black identities in popular culture, and as such, this statement concerns Black identity manifesting its own 'Blackness' in popular culture. As a writer, the idea of playing with identifications of the self, aligns with my interests in a decolonial (screen)writing approach, particularly when this 'play' takes place within spaces where monolithic, stereotyped 'identifications' are dominant. Even describing the act as 'play' supports the notion that an artistically conceived identity is not singular or authoritative – that to put *a* representation of Black Muslim female characterisation forward, is not to say it is *the*

authoritative representation of a Black Muslim woman's experience. There is still the issue of power and seeing, which cannot be sidestepped when considering the actual content of representation, regardless of whether the creator is of a shared identity to its subject, or otherwise. In fact, if reading Hall's statement above (1997, p.132) as a discussion of depicting Blackness through 'popular fantasies' sculpted by a conscious intent to reinforce colonial gaze – this space of playful discovery becomes something quite different – the space for play and discovery becomes limiting, restricting and confining. In *Fear of the Dark* (1996), Young discusses the:

> long historical tradition of black people being constituted by whites as the fantasy of a fantasy… These fantasies which emerge from the physical mechanisms of repression and projection are recognised at a popular, common sense level by many black people who see themselves as 'scapegoats' for white society's problems which arise, regarding, for example, housing, crime and unemployment. Those who embody Otherness and difference are often the focus for the projection of white societies' rages, fears and anxieties. (Young, 1996, p.183)

Young's reasoning here speaks towards an 'anxiety' provoking the patterns of narrowed representations of othered identities – an 'anxiety' which generates and requires the upholding of existing colonial narratives, thus upholding ideas of culturally imagined opposites to 'Western whiteness'.

1.6 Womanism

The works above serve to represent the wider net of considerations at play in my thesis. The focus of the conversation, however, is the area of understanding reached when those works converse with scholarship specific to representations and understandings of Black women; through Womanism[13], Black women in narrative film[14], and the spectatorship of Black women more broadly in society, alongside 'Afro-feminism' and 'Black feminism' in a European context (Emejulu and Sobande, 2019, pp.3-5). In considering a framework for constructing a

[13] As defined by Lalyli Phillips, meaning the identifying of one's "cultural roots… rather than a racial being" (2006, xxxvi).
[14] As explored through "race, sex and afro-religiosity" (Missouri, 2015).

conscious representation within the area of decolonisation, at this point it is clear there is a need to understand the cultural and historical criticisms concerning previous or existing representations of that particular identity, in order to avoid reproducing colonially influenced tropes and ideologies. Rather than purely knowing what to avoid, there are areas to look towards in order to form an understanding of ideologies from which to build. Through a gateway of Black feminism, Womanism offers an aligning discourse to decolonial practice.

The definition here of Womanism and Womanist theory follows the school of thought which critiques the privilege of gender above race and class within contemporary feminism (Phillips, 2006), with its application to film used in line with Mark A. Reid's definition that Womanist film is a rejection of race-less feminism, comprising of:

> (1) narrative content which constructs Black Womanist subjectivity and (2) the various processes by which an audience might receive the narrative's construction of this subjectivity. […] Black Womanist film results from imaginatively representing the socio-psychic and socio-economic experiences of African and African diasporic women. (Reid in Missouri, 2015, p.28)

In *Black Magic Woman and Narrative Film* (2015), Montré Aza Missouri builds on Reid's work, contending that there are specific expectations attributed to the Womanist film with regards to characterisation:

> (1) compassion for humanity, (2) recognition of the necessity for harmonious relationships between men and women, (3) willingness to fight oppression of any kind through 'everyday' actions as protest and (4) the ability to imagine alternative social, political and economic possibilities beyond the oppressive forces of the dominant society… Further, I would contend that a central theme of a Womanist film is an emphasis on spirituality, particularly Afro-religiosity, as it informs the narrative, characterisation and/or aesthetic. (Missouri, 2015, p.29)

It is worth acknowledging Reid and Missouri's assertion that not all films made by or centring Black women as the protagonists are automatically Womanist films, and in turn films directed or written by those who are not Black women can still be considered Womanist (Missouri,

2015, pp.28-29). As Missouri explains: "I contend that Womanist film is more concerned with Black female subjectivity and Womanist sensibilities that address issues of social injustice on various fronts […] than with authorship" (2015, p.29). With an area of understanding reached at the intersections of these theoretical concepts – once the tools of colonised representations are acknowledged and understood – a space is created from which ideas of decolonising representation for the screen can begin to be imagined through the writing of my script.

1.7 My Script

In the practice component of this thesis, I seek to utilise an oppositional approach to the (screen)written Black, Muslim, woman, in order to engage "in the tradition of Black female cultural and social activism" (Bobo, 2016) in the rehearsing of this cultivated identity as part of a conscious, decolonial process.

When it comes to implementing a decolonial approach, the issue of decolonising curricula within higher educational institutions has been a discussion point played out in the media since protests calling for the removal of a Cecil John Rhodes statue from the University of Cape Town's campus in April 2015, sparking debate worldwide, including the United Kingdom. The proposed remedy within learning environments has involved the inclusion of a wider pool of scholars and works from Black and global majority backgrounds to be studied. In the case of decolonising curricula the solution is more clear-cut; the lack of inclusion results in an erasure of representation of scholarly contribution by Black and global majority thinkers, rendering the canonical literature in any given field to be skewed towards 'Western' scholars. When paired with a cultural studies approach to seeing and meaning, such as the work of Hall and Berger discussed earlier, on an all-white curriculum, the masked ideology being presented is that there are no Black and global majority scholars, or that they are not worth studying. This, therefore, can be aided by including works by Black and global majority scholars.

In my script, the case for representation delves further than presence. As I demonstrate through the case studies in Chapter 3 of this thesis, inclusion on its own of a Black Muslim woman character does not address a conscious discussion of existing tropes. The inclusion of diverse scholars onto curricula contributes their work — it is they who are directing the reader what to "see" of their research, findings and expertise. Representation in terms of characterisation works differently – it is an imagined or fabricated example of a person. Where othered identities are concerned, they may be the only instance of that characterisation present, however they are not an exhaustive example of the peoples they represent, and in the case of

cinematic representation, they are shaped by factors (such as reinforcing the collective societal imagination) which render that non-exhaustive representation reductive and at times monolithic. To fully explore representation, my work delves further into the idea of opposition — of challenging gaze in order to push the boundaries of what is achievable in discussions surrounding representation.

To borrow from the words of Ella Shohat in *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, the screenplay must simultaneously deter from the "cultural flattening"(1994, p.179) of its characters, understanding the wider context of (mis)representations of Blackness, whilst not attempting to create an authoritative, representative, depiction of the Black Muslim woman.

What follows is an analysis of representations of Muslim women characters in recent English films. The findings of my analysis – the identification of specific constructions of female Muslim identity – provide the starting point for the deconstructive process of 'shedding' in the practice component, my script.

CHAPTER 2

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

In this section, I will outline the purpose and parameters of my study and detail the manner in which the research has been approached and undertaken. I will also describe how I envisaged the merging of the theoretical exploration with my practice – what the plan for the process looked like and how I envisaged the work to unfold. The aim of my study is to utilise cultural and critical race theorists and existing cinematic representations to explore:

i) the (narrow and minimal) presence of the Black Muslim woman in British cinema,

ii) whether 'decolonising' screenwriting is a possible approach and means towards addressing this representation,

iii) whether works of opposition, utilising a conscious breaking down of imposed narrative expectations and codes and conventions of screenplay formatting (Fusco, 1988), offer a way of translating decolonisation into a creative practise.

> "Methodology itself carries with it the codes of colonialism and imperialism, whilst functioning as one of the ways in which story is regulated and realised." Zuleika Sheik (2021)

In *Liminagraphy: Lessons in Life-affirming Research Practices for Collective Liberation* (2021), Zuleika Sheik posits a move away from research as a method and instead, offers research as practice for a decolonial approach to knowledge production.

> Indeed, in our efforts to *re-claim research as a practice* which is anti-colonial, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and non-anthropocentric we need to begin by dispelling the myths regarding knowledges. The pursuit of knowledge is not and has never been limited to the western university. Other 'traditions of knowledges' have and continue to exist on the outside of modernity/coloniality despite attempts at epistemicide, erasure and silencing. These knowledges continue to circulate around us through oral tradition, folktales, songs, dance, storytelling, ceremonies, rituals, recipes, customs, beliefs, practices and lore. It is in the reclaiming of these knowledges through

> ancestry, spirituality and positionality that we can start to reclaim research as a practice. In doing so we need to return to tradition, to those practices of spirituality, of deep connection and relation, deemed heathen, backwards and savage by modernity's gaze. (Sheik, 2021, pp.79-80)

From the outset it was the intention that this thesis would be research-driven, theoretically informed and practice-based; as a screen/writer the two for me are intrinsically linked – research moulds and shapes my practise, and my creative work is a both response to the research and in dialogue with theory.

In recent years, rising awareness and debates surrounding decolonisation within academia have led to questions regarding the manner in which I produce my creative work; the framework/s my creative outputs exist within, the notion of the 'master's house' in which I create, using the 'master's tools' (Lorde, 2018). Thematically, my work[15] often explores issues of otherness, identity and belonging in the context of race and Britain. However, aside from the content of my work, I had not yet consciously interrogated the actual process being utilised, from which these stories were being sprung. Much like the inserting of diverse characters into a story without considering how that diversity interacts with the (story) world (Saha, 2018), my process of conjuring up characters was being undertaken using and operating unconsciously within the parameters, and codes and conventions of an unexamined, uninterrogated framework – the masters house, with the master's tools – the accepted and expected way of telling story for the screen.

The purpose of my study is two-fold; to understand and explore the dearth of Black Muslim female characters on screen, by theorising alongside cultural and critical race and Black feminist scholarship (such as Emejelu and Sobande, 2019; Smith, 1997; Young, 1996), and then to take that work and feed it into my practice of consciously undoing the screenwriting process.

2.1 Literature engagement

It has been necessary to refine and clarify the terminology used to describe the subject of my thesis and the accompanying creative practise. 'Authenticity', for example, became a term specifically avoided as my study evolved and deepened. Despite having an

[15] Such as Redgrave, N. (2019) The Extraordinary Life of Mary Seacole. London: Penguin, and *Trumped* (Dir. Rodrigo Vazquez, Bethnal Films, 2017)

autoethnographic approach to the creative element of my work, to claim authenticity as a Black Muslim woman is not possible, because I do not represent every single Black Muslim woman. I therefore cannot claim to create an *authentic* screenplay about all Black Muslim women in Britain. Rather, this study explores the possibilities and attempts of a decolonial approach to storytelling within the screenplay as a form, placing the focus on the specific intersecting identity of women who are Black and Muslim. The approach itself builds from theorists and creatives of colour who have explored alternative decolonised methods to their practises, and I weave these existing texts in both my theoretical framework, and my creative practice. I use both 'text' and 'weave' very intentionally here; etymologically, the word 'text' derives from the Latin 'texere', meaning to 'weave' (OED, 2001). I view the crafting of this study as just that – a delicately, painstakingly stitched together set of ideas to build a new framework of thought – a *new house*, from which to manifest my creative work.

That is not to say I only consider and reference theorists and creatives of colour as a rule. This work is a conversation with the notion of artistic and creative decolonisation, and how consciously adapted approaches may affect representation – any text that speaks to this, whether in reinforcement or in contrast, is relevant. Ultimately, I am interested in the interrogation of a status quo (Jensen, 2005) and how far this status quo affects the creative imagination of the constructed Black Muslim woman, and how she appears (or doesn't appear) on screen. I use the dialogue with these texts to consider whether challenging the rooting of this status quo using decolonising approaches, can offer a wider space for this intersecting identity to exist, and what existing in that space might look like.

The films that form the focus of Chapter 3 have been selected, largely, on the basis of their characters. The analysis within that chapter focuses on five characters, from five different films made in Britain between the years 2004 and 2020, serving as examples of the general characterisation trends of Muslim women in British cinema. The time period spans from when the effects of the 11th September 2001 terrorist attacks were being reflected in attitudes towards Muslims, until roughly the point of starting to write this thesis. The films selected are not intended to be representatives in themselves. Rather, the point is that if my arguments about these films hold, then they hold generally – that is to say, both in relation to the selected films as in relation to any other British films of this period.

2.2 Merging into perspective

In this section, I will discuss the combining of theories in offering a research perspective. Over the course of the study, in interrogating the narrow and minimal presence of the Black Muslim woman in British cinema, I approach the issue by forming two pillars of exploration; examining theories and discourses of Black women in Britain (Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe, 2018), by investigating representation in terms of recurring colonially inflicted (Hunt and Lessard, 2002) attributes and locales (Gordon-Chipembere, 2011), and then separately, I explore the Muslim woman on screen. I then explore the terms of these representations alongside one another, discussing the intersection of the Black, Muslim woman and the limitations imposed by restrictive tropes of the individual stands of this identity. This exploration encompasses not just film, but touches on broader cultural outputs contributing to the cultural imagination of both groups, within a cultural studies context, alongside a selection of critical race theory concepts, including Womanism (Phillips, 2006), oppositional gaze (hooks, 2003, pp. 94-98) and Black feminism (Emejulu and Sobande, 2019).

Informed by this theory, the resulting screenplay is a conscious attempt at a decolonised re-presentation of Black Muslim female characterisation: decolonising and deconstructing the creative space of the existing accepted framework of the screenplay narrative of the 'other'. In *Reclaiming Images of Women in Films from Africa and the Black* Diaspora (1994), N. Frank Ukadike presents this as follows:

> Because of the ways Black subjectivity has been constantly abused in films, a new sensitivity to Black women's concerns indicates a concerted effort to move questions of the "other" toward the centre. This stance also represents a movement toward thoroughgoing cinematic decolonization; in other words, the need for a theory that takes into account the economic history of [Black] (mis)representation and ensuing stereotyping, as well the interaction between social realities (whole lives) and cinematic fictions (fragmentation), and ... Black women need to give that theory [and practice] its direction. Hence, Black women must take the lead in a revisionist dialogue, an alternative discourse that requires culture based interpretation around questions of ethnic identity and representation. (Ukadike, 1994, pp.102-103)

As seen in Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives* (2019) in literature and *Fairview* (Drury, 2018) in theatre, I attempt to utilise a decolonised approach to the screenplay, dissecting the process, interrogating gaze and presenting the experience in the form of a thesis and the screenplay itself to create this "revisionist dialogue" (Ukadike, 1994). This close and purposeful relationship between theory and creative output with regards to representation is well-versed. In the article 'Outing the Black Feminist Filmmaker in Julie Dash's Illusions' (2004), Judylyn S. Ryan notes that Black women's theorising often takes place in narrative forms, "in the stories we create", dismantling the divide between theory and performance, suggesting that works by Black women artists perform theory (2004, p.1323). The practice element is an experiment to explore to what extent representation at the point of creation can be 'decolonised', if at all, and by approaching the creative practice as an exercise of 'shedding' and undoing, provide a useful addition to the discussion of decolonising the creative process of screenwriting.

2.3 SCREENPLAY: PROCESS

2.3.1 Initial Aims

In terms of 'diverse' representation, identity itself is so often the conflict. That is to say, the otherness against the 'normal' is the basis of the narrative conflict. In *Shedding*, I wanted to explore what it would look like to have two different process approaches side-by-side; the first being a narrative path which fit the characters into a plot where the 'othered' culture is positioned as the main source of conflict, allowing my unconscious instincts as a creative writer to guide and mould the characters into a position where they could serve the plot. Alongside this, I wanted to consciously disrupt and dismantle that first process by interrogating the narrative and character choices made, against the issues and tropes unfolding from my research, and re-present the story and characters, and how they both change when explored through a decolonised lens. The resulting script shows both, although not in comparison side-by-side throughout.[16] Structurally, the final version as it stands, presents the process within a structure that feels fluid as a journey, beginning with the earlier 'unconsciously' written version of the story and characters, and then, like *Fairview* (2018) stopping at a point before the end of the

[16] The 'unconscious' lens ceases after Scene 82 (p.178), which illustrates both a colonial gaze, and what Nasra and Zahra believe to be happening by 'exorcising' Raya.

version, to return in order to re-explore it through a different lens. My hope in doing this is that the decolonial, interrogated lens removes a form of constraint that hindered other authentic narrative threads coming through and taking a place at the centre of the story.

In order to tell the story in this way, I decided to inform the narrative from my own life – it felt it had to stem from the personal in order to imagine the positionality of an identity conflict inflicted on a narrative. It was also a form of conscious undoing for myself as a writer and creator, to release the constraints of acting out 'otherness' against an environment. I wanted to explore and apply the idea of rejecting the notion of otherness as understood by the status quo that imposes it. To be an 'other' is to exist in conflict with one's environment. This is both imposed externally and ingrained, through seeing oneself reflected in the eyes of said environment. The 'eye' in this thesis is (British) cinema, and this imposed and ingrained conflict forms a part of one's experience of the world. When telling stories, this often becomes the basis of expectation towards how one's story is framed. I am interested in what happens when 'otherness' isn't the conflict – when that imposed idea of conflict is removed. Would utilising a consciously oppositional, decolonial approach expand the reductive characterisations of Muslim women in British cinema, and indeed open a space in which a Black, Muslim woman exists more prominently in the cultural imagination?

As explored in Chapter 1 of this thesis, through Fanon's work on the psychopathological effects of racism (Fanon, 1986), 'otherness' requires an existence of and opposition to a 'non-other'. There must be a 'normal' for otherness to be pitted against. Therefore, otherness has a dependant relationship with 'non-otherness', where the non-other dominates and dictates the other according to its own position as the status quo. Can otherness be rejected? Can that interconnection be severed? What might that look like and what would being conscious in the process mean in the formation of a screenplay? These were thoughts I was swimming in as I worked on the interrogated lens and 'Part Two' of the screenplay.

2.3.2 Process

Over the course of the research, not unusually for a feature screenplay project, the idea changed significantly (particularly in the early stages of study), and the script as it currently stands had several wider narrative overhauls, as well as expected redrafts and editing needed to refine the story, plot and script structure. Something arising that led to shifts in narrative direction were issues surrounding my (unconscious) participation in the use of tropes and

colonial ideologies about the characters I was representing. I found that, without meaning to, I was by default recycling ideas about the characters that, the more I read and watched, the more it became clear to me that I needed to challenge. In an earlier draft, I ended up with a climax and resolution that presented two white characters in a central, saviour-esque role in the story's ending. What was interesting about this process, was when given free rein to write about the characters I wanted, in the way I wanted to present them, I still resorted to narrow stereotypes to feed a plot that itself was restrained in scope. When given the freedom, my work represented a diversity in terms of characters and cultures represented, but it was not a work implementing decolonisation theory – it was not consciously undoing any colonially-influenced structures in terms of the way the characters of the story were being presented.

The earliest iterations of the script featured at least two characters who appear in the final version, but in different situations. An earlier version of the story involved a mother (a version of Saima) whose sister (a version of Wada) comes to the UK to seek a termination after getting pregnant through having an extra-marital affair, when at the same time her teenage daughter is also pregnant. There were issues with both the story and characters; the two generations were constantly at odds due to their relationship with their culture, and they were presented as at odds solely because the 'othered' culture was positioned as incongruent to the natural order of the surrounding story world and its status quo. In time, the story itself also didn't feel large enough for a feature length screenplay, so I stepped away to focus on gathering a sturdier theoretical grounding before continuing with the creative practice.

A crucial turning point occurred on seeing the Jackie Sibblies Drury play *Fairview* (2018), and the way it handled its presentation of the idea of an imposed lens on othered characters, in this case, a middle class African American family. As described by Michael Pearce, *Fairview* is "a confrontational de-construction of the white gaze" (Pearce, 2021, p.81). It presents the process of a narrative distortion taking place as it is imposed upon by both the lens and then the presence of a whiteness that speaks over the 'other,' adding layers of projected characteristics and plot assumptions that transform the story from a family of characters preparing for a party, into a set of caricatures embodying a series of Black stereotypes that strip away any emotional depth originally present in its first Act. In my case, I wanted to interrogate the idea of positionality and lens, however less outwardly facing – given my own wandering into repeating tropes and stereotypes, I was less interested in commenting on the manner in which positionality is imposed by others in screenwriting, but more so in exploring my own writing process and the limits and restraints posed on my work by an unconscious partaking in the replication of reductive character and narrative tropes. Once I had firmly decided that the

interrogation taking place was against my own work and process, the path towards the structure of the final draft was set.

2.3.3 Unconscious Lens and Interrogated Lens: terminology

Initially, the split screen scenes were numbered, not named. This became confusing, both for readers to follow, and for myself in managing the structural flow of the work. I also attempted to experiment with the format of the screenplay as a way of consciously 'undoing' the form and visually representing the process, however I became concerned that the visual interruption this caused disrupted the flow of the narrative in a way that was counterproductive: at the heart of the screenplay is a story to be told, and it was not worth disrupting the communication of that story in order to experiment with formatting constraints. Incidentally, in that initial formatting experimentation, which involved creating panel boxes to recreate the sections of a dual-screened scene, I was creating a physical restriction in the form of the box that was segmenting and disjointing the way the screenplay could be read and absorbed.
I settled on 'unconscious lens' and 'interrogated lens' as those best described what I was doing in each. The first, unconscious lens, I was using (the master's) tools to carve the story into a narrative in which the central conflict was the 'otherness' of the characters' identities. In the second, interrogated lens, I was undoing aspects of the characters that I had inflicted on them to serve the narrative, and then allowing for the characters' stories to expand with increased verisimilitude.

2.3.4 Overlapping Lenses

Arriving at the healer scenes (Scenes 55 to 57, pp.148-154) there felt a need to review the way the whole story had been told to that point. The commencement of 'Part Two' coincides with a point where it became clear that the narrative had reached a fork in the story arc; the characters had become trapped by their tropes and the only way to untangle them was to re-travel through the narrative from the beginning. This wasn't merely an edit or superficial scene re-write, but an interrogation of the fabric of the whole story, examining its foundations and how they'd been built. This interrogation involved examining my characters and plot against my research findings, identifying tropes I was playing into and repeating, and making conscious, theoretically informed decisions as to the characters and their motivations.

By Scene 57 (p.152) the unconscious lens takes the characters to a point that cannot be recovered from – once Saima has left Raya with the healer, her cultural beliefs have superseded her daughter's safety in a manner that positions cultural otherness as a state that impedes judgement. This narrative choice notably does not even align with the manner in which the character has been set up. In other words, for the spectacle of the scenes at the healer's apartment to take place in this way, for plot purposes, Saima could not be present. Therefore, by removing Saima in order to present the spectacle of the scenes (and indeed the choice to turn the scenes into a spectacle), in the unconscious lens, Saima's character is reduced to a person who would do anything that fit with her religious beliefs, purely because she is led blindly by them. Continuing to show Muslim female characters in this fanatic-like position, also strengthens the idea that Muslim women will always choose culture and religion over the safety of their children. Therefore this was an important and purposeful point in which to disrupt the narrative and rewind back to the beginning of the story, to the establishing shot of the house, and begin again with 'Part Two' in a 'decolonised', conscious retelling.

The purpose of the interrogated lens was largely about allowing a position of character verisimilitude (in keeping with my research) to guide the narrative, rather than having plot points for the characters to reach. It became very clear in doing this that the scene at the healer's could never have taken place in the way that it had, once the characters were not falling into the stereotypes and pitfalls seen in my research. In particular, when given emotional depth where she is not exclusively motivated by her religious beliefs (as exemplified in the film *Honour* (2014), in Chapter 3 of this thesis), it became clear that Saima, not just would not, but could not have left Raya alone with the healer. The unconscious lens restricted Saima's character to the point of positioning her as villainous due to her beliefs, which is commonly repeated in representations of Muslim women on screen. It is not about never showing aspects of culture in a negative light, but about showing the complexity of the characters motivations in a way that is more in line with the lived experience of a person of that identity. An effort to seek character verisimilitude in offering a representation of a Black, Muslim female experience ('a' singular offering, not 'the' – I am not attempting to speak to the entire experience of being a Black Muslim woman, nor am I suggesting that Black, Muslim womanhood is a singular, homogenous experience). When allowed a full (back)story of her own, the trauma she is alluded to having experienced during the Rwandan genocide at the hands of a male fighter is enough to query how believable it would be that she would leave Raya with a man she is unfamiliar with. Furthermore, seeing the kind of person she is, which is allowed space to be demonstrated in 'Part Two' – shows Saima as overall a concerned, caring and protective

mother. It would not align with the character to leave her daughter in such a questionable situation, regardless of her religious beliefs. In the story world, the healer visit does happen in 'Part Two' but not as we saw it in 'Part One' and we don't see what happens at all – that is because it did not function as a point of conflict or tension between Saima and Raya. The reality of the character is, Saima would do whatever to keep her children safe – if the healer seemed suspicious or came across as unnerving, it is not believable that the character would have kept Raya there. Saima also does not slap Raya in the second version – the purpose for the slap was purely to broaden the wedge between the two characters and position Saima in conflict with her daughter because of a cultural clash (Raya drinking alcohol which is against their religion).

The same is true for Raya – her character in 'Part One' demonstrated behaviour that played into stereotypes repeated in my case studies and beyond, and re-enforced tropes presented in theoretical discussion. In 'Part One' Raya's inner conflict relied on Islam presenting a barrier for her to co-exist with her environment. In 'Part Two', when these kinds of tropes were actively challenged, it became more apparent that certain behaviours demonstrated in 'Part One' did not align with her character's personality – she would not have returned home completely drunk to the point of slurring. Removing the focus of conflict away from religion also allowed for deeper exploration of the characters' true motivations and basis of their psychological needs. As per Abraham Maslow's analysis of peoples basic primal drives, the 'Heirarchy of Needs' (Yorke, 2013, pp.130-131), when Raya's belongingness and love needs, esteem needs and self-fulfilment needs are all tied to Islam, and specifically where Islam is the barrier to every areas' needs being met, the psychological basis of her character solely rests on the opposition she has to her religion and identity. Once that is the case, the story – and expected plot – are limited to a well-trodden landscape of stereotypes and tropes.

Scenes in 'Part One' with the interrogated lens interrupting are areas where my own doubts and questions regarding my process occurred. The exception being the incidence of the interrogated lens in Scenes 1 and 2; this is used as a framing device to orient the reader, and to establish the set-up of the split scenes/ alternative lenses. 'Part Two' ultimately became the process of interrogation, re-weaving consciousness into the story, reaching a climax and end that utilised my research and addressed the pitfalls and 'blind spots' I had been noticing, and avoided exploiting aspects of the characters culture to purely serve as the narrative tension.

CHAPTER 3

BLACK, MUSLIM, WOMAN[17]: THE BLIND-SPOT OF INTERSECTING IDENTITIES

This chapter is divided in two sections. In the first and longest section, I explore the representation of Muslim women characters by analysing the introduction of each of their narrative arcs, and the manner in which their character is presented to the audience. In the second part of the chapter, I offer an overview of the features that have marked representations of the Black woman in British contemporary culture. The chapter closes with a series of considerations that may explain the dearth of Black Muslim female characters in British cinema over the last two decades. Across the chapter I identify and discuss:

- What are the representations of Muslim women in British cinema?
- Why might these identities be represented in this way?
- What are the limitations and blind spots arising from the manner in which these intersecting identities are represented?

[17] Title is a reference to Evaristo, B. (2019). *Girl, Woman, Other*. New York: Grove Press

3.1 Who is the Muslim woman in British Cinema?

Fig.3.1 Archie Panjabi as 'Yasmin' in *Yasmin* (2004)

Fig.3.2 Leticia Wright as 'Aisha' in *My Brother the Devil* (2012)

Fig.3.3 Aiysha Hart as 'Mona' in *Honour* (2014)

Fig.3.4 Joanna Scanlan as 'Mary' in *After Love* (2020)

Fig.3.5 (L-R) Manjinder Virk as 'Nasima' and Riz Ahmed as 'Sohail' in *Britz* (2007)

Introduction

The last two decades have seen a rise in the inclusion of the Muslim woman on British cinema screens, in certain cases, occupying a featured or protagonist role. This inclusion, whilst a step towards reflecting British society in the twenty years since the turn of the century, demonstrates certain limitations. Repetitive traits, characteristics and narrative paths suggest a pattern, or a glass ceiling of sorts, in terms of 'who' a Muslim woman on screen is able to 'be,' and what she is able to portray. In the article 'From Mute to Menacing', Mariam Khan (2020) speaks of this representation, explaining:

> While more Muslims are represented on our TV screens than ever, it seems that representation isn't the easy utopia that many imagined it would be.

> Nuance is lacking, and the representation that does exist leans towards a male-oriented presence. As diversity boxes are ticked, and hijabs scattered here and there, the nuance of Muslim identities is strangled further. (Khan, 2020)

Khan here identifies the 'gender gap' between male and female Muslim representation, with the latter occupying less screen time, exhibiting less character depth and less developed narrative arcs. I will explore this chasm between male and female Muslim representation as the chapter progresses. However, the purpose of this chapter is to build a picture of who the Muslim woman in British cinema is – who she has been imagined to be in her own right. Khan describes a "strangling" of nuance with regards to identity representation, and it is this point that I would like to explore and consider further, against selected films. Rather than solely analyse characters in terms of their respective narrative arcs, I also employ an analytical grid which serves to compare as directly as possible the characters' representations against each other, to form a wider understanding of nuance, or *how* it is lacking (Khan, 2020). The criterion for this grid is devised in-line with prominent criticisms regarding aspects of character which, when omitted, result in monolithic representations, which in turn diminish opportunities for empathy and relatability amongst the cultural imagination (Jaganathan, 2018). Taking these criticisms and applying them in a way that can be measured and compared; how much a character speaks when introduced, how much they display capacity for joy and how long they appear on screen when introduced – all serve as factors which contribute nuance and engender relatability.

The fact that I have films to refer to when looking for the Muslim woman in British cinema (note: just Muslim, not Black *and* Muslim) demonstrates that inclusion is occurring – the Muslim woman as an identity exists within British cinematic representation. The question of representation that I am interested in, is *how* this inclusion presents. In the same article, Khan quotes Nour Halabi, who proposes that the current scope of this inclusion serves to emphasise and reinforce negative, stereotypical associations with Islam such as terrorism, by positioning Muslim characters as the 'permanent and impossible enemy'.

> The impossibility of defeating this presumed enemy is then often attributed to their deviousness and manipulative behaviour – take, for example, *Bodyguard* [2018], where the show's plot hinges on the Muslim character lying about her sympathies until the very end. (Khan, 2020)

Halabi here refers to, arguably one of the most notable roles for a Muslim woman on the BBC in recent years, the television series *Bodyguard* (Mercurio, 2018). Initially, the Muslim woman protagonist is presented as a victim needing rescuing from her terrorist husband, however the twist reveals her to have been the terrorist all along. This instance of inclusion, where the Muslim female character is integral to the story's plot, is arguably a step forward. The character is afforded her own agency, and whilst that agency does not align with British political and cultural values, 'she' – the Muslim woman – is present.

The problem arises when the agency of the character is consistently presented in this way, in a manner that is misaligned to British cultural and political values. When frequently positioned as Halabi's "permanent and impossible enemy", and perpetuating one-dimensional, un-nuanced, stereotypical imaginings of Muslim women, particularly when these representations dominate the cultural sphere, this "strangling" takes place beyond the screen and into the cultural imagination. As Khan notes: "The show won a Bafta and was nominated for two Emmys, the acknowledgment from both these institutions further legitimising the regressive stereotypes it employed" (2020). In this chapter I explore how far this applies across twenty years of British cinema, via an examination of the following films:

Yasmin (2004) Directed by K. Glenaan. Screen Yorkshire/ Channel 4
Britz (2007) Directed by P. Kosminsky. ARTE/Channel 4
My Brother the Devil (2012) Directed by S. El Hosaini. Rooks Nest Entertainment
Honour (2014) Directed by S. Khan. Isle of Man Film
After Love (2020) Directed by A. Khan. BBC Films/BFI

3.1.2 **YASMIN**

Fig.3.6 Archie Panjabi as 'Yasmin' in *Yasmin* (2004)

Who she is

Yasmin is a British Muslim woman of Pakistani origin. She lives in West Yorkshire, which in the film is depicted as having a prominent community of British Pakistani residents. The 2011 UK Census recorded 106,614 people of Pakistani origin in Bradford (20.4% of the total population of the region), suggesting the depiction of the community, whilst ten years prior, to be accurately represented. It is feasible that such a community existed in Keighley, West Yorkshire, at the time of the film's setting.[18] In the film, Yasmin is depicted as in her mid-twenties and is played by Archie Panjabi, of Sindhi Hindu origin.

We meet her

Against a backdrop of boulder-lined fields, hilly horizons and smog-coated pockets of industrial town, a burgundy piece of fabric pierces the centre of the frame (Y1). We are soon to discover that this is Yasmin, the eponymous character of the film, being positioned for her

[18] Bradford is the largest city, closest to that where the film is set in Keighly, ten miles northwest. (Office for National Statistics, 2013)

unfolding story. Sounds of the call to prayer (a ubiquitous trope in British film and television to denote a Muslim community) harks from a non-visible mosque in the distance. The scarf lays against the grass, lingering symbolically 'on England's pleasant pastures seen, […] in England's green and pleasant land',[19] as if it is surrendered to the land on which it lays – this same land in which we will later see the protagonist walk and inhabit (Y2). A series of close-ups show our subject dressing, a flash of a hijab-framed face here and there, although the face is not yet shown in full frame. The hijab-wearing face does not represent this character fully at this moment, it only represents fragments of her.

The camera pulls out to a medium shot, where Yasmin lays next to the surrendered scarf and struggles with her clothing (Y3). The items of clothing she wears are at visible, cultural odds with one another. To the left of the frame, the side of the scarf, Yasmin wears a dark hijab and dark burgundy abaya. Her raised back leads to her legs, elevated from the ground, as if pulling away from the hijab and abaya, as she battles to pull on a pair of demin jeans. She succeeds and stands, her bottom half at harmony with the ground on which she walks (Y4).

She removes her abaya, momentarily surrendering it to the ground, before bundling the scarf and abaya hurriedly into her arms. She has removed the majority of this cultural clothing which is at odds with the environment, at one point putting it on the ground – she cannot walk this ground whilst being so largely at odds with it. Whilst she does eventually retrieve these garments, she bundles them up into a ball, shrinking and minimising them, and making them easier to hide. Her hijab remains on her head to the end of the scene. She retains this one facet of her culture, which interestingly, is the most visually symbolic garment with regards to clothing associated with Muslim women (Y5). This does not seem in line with the character's motivation in the rest of the scene. The hijab is the largest, most recognisable 'obstacle' at odds

[19] *Jerusalem Hymn – Last Night of the Proms* (YouTube, 2011)

with Yasmin's environment, keeping it on seems to defeat the purpose of removing any of the other garments. This raises questions regarding the authenticity, or at least the understanding of Yasmin as a Muslim woman and what is motivating her. The hijab remaining as the last garment feels less to do with Yasmin's motivation, and more to do with where the viewer's gaze is being directed, and the imposed weight, significance and perhaps even exotification (Salim, 2013) of the hijab. Its use as a visual indicator is at the expense of the character's motivations that have been set up and presented.

Yasmin removes her hijab in a subsequent scene, after she has unlocked her car and as she reaches to open the car door (Y6). Just prior to this moment, the call to prayer comes to an end and is no longer heard in the distance. She enters the car on the driver's side and puts on a pair of sunglasses, completing the cultural garment removal. Now, in her Western clothes (jeans, pink and red striped long sleeved-top and sunglasses), she drives out of the frame to the right, the same direction her jeans faced as she tussled between her 'constricting' hijab and abaya, and the 'modern' jeans. Much of this scene can be interpreted as a pitting against of cultures; the 'constricting' Islamic attire against the modern clothing and freedoms (a wide, open, green landscape, and red [20] car). Excluding a young teen boy reciting the call to prayer at a mosque, Yasmin is the first character with dialogue in the film (*Yasmin*, 2004, 3:41).

Her narrative/character arc

Yasmin's predominant narrative arc concerns the disruption of her marriage when her husband is detained at an immigration holding centre, following the events of 11th September 2001[21]. The narrative timeline takes place pre- and post- 9/11, exploring the impact the events

[20] The colour is significant here as red stands out, it demands attention to be seen. Much like the removal of a hijab, and being 'seen'.
[21] 11th September 2001 saw terrorist attacks by plane crash targeting the World Trade Centre, New York, and The Pentagon, Arlington, Virginia. A fourth plane crashed in a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The attacks

have on Yasmin's position in society. Yasmin is presented as a spirited, headstrong woman who appears to have honed a cultural and personal balancing act, by both appeasing her traditional South Asian (Pakistani) family, and integrating as an accepted member of the small town where she lives. The precarious nature of this balancing act is established from the film's outset, when we see Yasmin physically wrestle with these two cultures as she hides in a field to change clothes, out of her abaya and hijab and into jeans and sunglasses. Yasmin's self-assured, carefree attitude extends beyond rebelling against her family's cultural expectations. We understand early on that she has purchased an expensive soft-top car on a whim, to the disapproval of her colleague John, a Caucasian British man who harbours feelings for her. We get the sense that Yasmin is not so much trying to fit into a neat box of 'the Westernised woman'; her duality is not a result of wanting to be wholly Westernised, nor does it stem from a resentment of her family's culture. Rather, she seeks the freedom to be herself, without either her family or society dictating what that should be.

Yasmin cooks for her widowed father and brother, and respects the cultural norms as dictated by her Desi, Islamic heritage without resentful defiance – her approach is that of being able to do it all, both what is required of her and what she desires, which, in the first act of the narrative arc, are able to coexist albeit with secrecy on her part. This balancing act results in her entering and maintaining a non-consummated marriage with Faysal, an (illegal) immigrant, a close family friend and goat-herder from rural Pakistan, who is completely at odds with the British, Western culture which Yasmin has learned to navigate so effectively. Again, what is required of her (an arranged marriage to secure Faysal's British residency status) and what she desires (to be free to navigate society as she chooses, defined by her own terms) are able to coexist, provided she is careful about those two different cultural worlds colliding.

Following the events of the 11th September 2001, and the detainment of her husband under the Anti-terrorism Act (2001), the two cultural worlds Yasmin has juggled inevitably collide, stripping her freedom to navigate the world as she chooses. It also challenges her freedom to decide who she is – with society deciding instead, reducing her to its narrow parameters of what a south Asian Muslim is, and ostracising her as a result. The film seemingly endeavours to depict a crisis of identity in the scenes in which Yasmin code

claimed the lives of 3,000 people, leading to far-reaching changes in anti-terror approaches and operations in the United States and beyond.

switches [22] between cultures, hiding parts of herself in one from the other. To suggest this is to present the notion that any dual heritage, or instance of mixed heritages, results in this crisis of identity, a need to hide and flit between one and the other. Whether this is true to life is not my point. Rather, to offer this as a given without exploring the implications of this suggestion raises questions about the nuance and depth of the character depiction, and the understanding of the dual (or multi) heritage experience. Yasmin's character is depicted as headstrong and rebellious, she is not coerced into her situation. She wants to encompass both cultures, it is society that refuses to make room for them both. The gaze of Yasmin's situation is placed to suggest that this is an equal problem – that both of her cultural sides are as unaccommodating as each other. To use the hijab as an example; Yasmin does not vocalise disdain for the hijab as an antiquated practise, nor does she vocally begrudge the wearing of it for want of having her hair uncovered all the time. Her removal of the hijab contributes to a freedom of identity; wearing it serves as a barrier – the ideological Western view of her identity is narrowed when the hijab is worn. She is able to navigate more successfully without it and the constraints and prejudice it attracts. The reason the hijab is restrictive in Yasmin's instance is more to do with the restriction it imposes on her from a Western view of what it represents. Removal of the hijab for this reason, assimilation, when presented through a Western lens, is posited as forward-thinking or modernisation away from what the West perceives to be backward or archaic thinking. However, for the subject, hijab removal for the purposes of assimilation (where the consequence is ostracization), is less an act of moving away from an archaic practice, and more an act of self-preservation to avoid ill-treatment. Where a Western lens posits progression, it fails to see the violence of its enforced conformity. Yasmin's true crisis of identity arguably occurs when her religion and background result in her ostracization at work and in the Anglo-British factions of society in which she frequents – when British society 'others' and rejects the South Asian and Muslim aspects of her identity. The film neither seems to grasp nor take ownership of this, opting for a 'both sides' treatment instead, seeing Yasmin's brother radicalised and the potential relationship between her and John left unexplored.

Chasm between male and female Muslim character representation

Yasmin opens with two male characters, an elder man looking to be of South Asian origin, bearded, charging with purpose towards the screen front, followed by a boy in his

[22] Referring to the act of cultural adaptation within single interactions (Malinksky, 2007).

early teens, similarly of South Asian origin. The dullen brown bricks and compactly built Victorian-era terraced housing remain largely untouched or modernised, a combination of these images suggesting we are likely in the north of the UK. Thirty seconds into the film, we are faced with the reason for the characters' urgent pace – a racial slur has been sprayed onto the metal shutter of a building. Among the Arabic and English letters of the adjacent sign is the word *masjid*, meaning 'mosque'. The scene suggests that this problem, and the weight of the dilemma, rests on and with the male characters.

Over the course of the ensuing one minute and fifteen seconds until a group of three hijabi women are shown from afar, we see the young teen giving the call to prayer, an establishing shot confirming that the characters indeed entered a mosque, and further establishing shots of the West Yorshire countryside giving a sense at the very least that this is not London. The three hijabi women, standing outside on a pavement across the street from a passing car, cement the sense that this is a South Asian, Muslim community – they appear in the fibre of the environment and landscape, as extras on the film's streets, they are embedded in the story's world. These visual indicators serve to show that this is a South Asian community in Britain, where so far the men bear the brunt of the challenges and the women congregate and socialise. For the next three-and-a-half minutes until a character speaks (excluding the teen male reciting the call to prayer), the film continues to establish the world, with a mixture of men, women and children going about their day, and scenic shots (stack boulder barriers separating green but dull fields, bushy green horizons bordering industrial pockets under a hovering smog of pollution). It is against this countryside backdrop that, at 1:33, we get the flash of a burgundy scarf from behind the boulder wall, leading to our first glimpses of Yasmin, removing her religious-wear. After we meet Yasmin, but before any character is yet to speak, we revisit a male character in bed (2:47) staying with him until he rises and leaves the room.

> **First character speaks dialogue:** Yasmin (3:41) greets colleague John with "A'right". She speaks with a Northern accent.
>
> **Yasmin speaks:** as above.
>
> **Percentage of Muslim women on screen in first five minutes** (where religion is clear through clothing or character knowledge provided in the film): 83 seconds, approximately 28% of screen time.
>
> **Evidence of joy:** Number of seconds the character smiles within five minutes of screen time after being introduced (non-consecutive): 5 seconds.

3.1.3 **NASIMA**

Fig.3.7 Manjinder Virk as 'Nasima' in *Britz* (2007)

Britz is spilt into two narrative parts, one for each sibling character, with the male character, Sohail (played by Riz Ahmed), shown first. This is a narrative choice – it is his story and his character that have been chosen to open and lead the film's narrative. It could, however, be argued that this is not an indication of character importance, but a literary device to disguise the film's twist, that Nasima becomes a terrorist.

Who she is

Nasima, played by Manjinder Virk, is a medical student in Leeds, the middle child and only female sibling in a strict, traditional Desi-Muslim household. She is in her early twenties, and politically aware and active, particularly in light of Britain's foreign and domestic policy and anti-terrorism legistlation in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Nasima's relationship with her Britishness is complex; she is untrusting of the country in which she lives, and her attempts to integrate into society, whilst also push back for the rights she believes in, prove difficult.

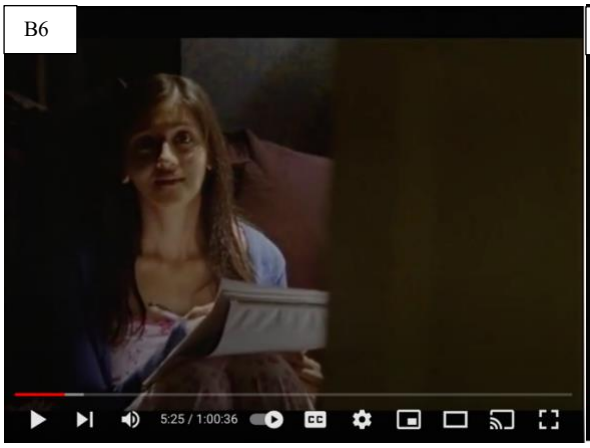
We meet her

Nasima flings open her bedroom door (*Britz*, 2007, 3:57), pop-rock music blares from the room behind her. "What?" she demands from her brother, angrily. She is to the right of the frame, looking off left and up slightly towards him, re-enforcing what we know from previous dialogue – she's the younger of the two (B1). The lilac painted walls at the forefront of the frame turn into draped fabric towards the back of the frame, edging a line into Nasima's room and framing the character herself. Whilst the colours aren't typically traditional, the style of the cloth could be considered fitting with a South Asian textile aesthetic. The lilac-painted but

otherwise plain walls ahead of Nasima, leading to the outside of her room, fit a more typical, modern 'Western' aesthetic of the time the film is set (circa 2005). Deeper into her room (her personal space), we find this South Asian-esque fabric, also framing Nasima and suggesting that in the sanctuary of her room, she embraces cultural tradition.

In the following scene, from close behind Nasima's right shoulder in the frame (3:59), we tightly centre on the youngest sibling, Rafiq, and his facial injuries, sustained by an attack (B2). We see this from Nasima's perspective – she cannot (and will not) look away from the suffering her younger brother is experiencing. This injustice fills her line of vision, igniting frustration at her older brother Sohail, leading her to ask him pointedly, "How many times does your brother have to get beaten up by the BNP before you think we should do something about it?" (B3)

B6

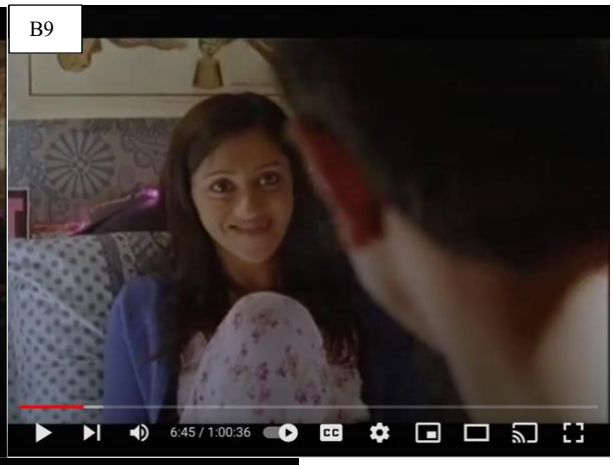


B7

Later, Sohail returns home, noticing a slither of light from underneath Nasima's bedroom door. He opens it partially, revealing Nasima studying. She appears relieved that it's him and not someone else in the house (B6). Pushing the door open further reveals a female character to the right of the frame (B7). Sohail teases, "you've got a friend in your room after eleven o'clock, one word from me and you get grounded," revealing both the strictness of the household, but also the (gender and/or age-based) power Sohail holds in the house. Nasima's character also demonstrates she is not afraid to rebel – against her parents, at least.

B8

B9



B10

Seeing the inside of Nasima's room in a wider frame within the first five minutes of her introduction grounds the character in a sense of place, providing her an autonomy within a space that is her own. It feels obvious that the introduction of a main character within a family home would include their bedroom, that space that they have made their own, yet it is rare amongst the films I analyse in this chapter. Nasima's room is typical of a young woman student – jewellery and accessories to the left of the frame, a cluttered computer desk and posters and pictures stuck to the walls (B8). Amongst those posters and pictures are images of a political nature; *'Us out of Iraq'* and *'Protect'* can be seen to the left of Nasima, appearing close to her body in the frame. These political posters are positioned at the opposite side of the frame to Sohail, with the two characters also positioned at either side of the frame, suggesting that politically, they are on opposing sides. In this scene, Nasima tries to explain to her brother, that "things have changed…since these new laws, the police are all over us." Sohail disagrees, and in the same vein as questioning what his younger brother did to provoke an attack in a previous scene, he retorts that if the police are behaving illegally, then the law should be invoked to stop them (6:35), rather than protests and "dressing up like Arabs and blowing up London." The conversation reveals that this is not why Sohail is studying law. He is instead studying as a means to escape "here" – their environment, their community, "prayers and selling chapatis". Nasima tells him he's turning into "such a Brit" with disdain. The physical distance between them closes (B9) until their opposing views cannot be contained in the space any longer – Nasima stands, facing away from her brother and towards the window to the outside world (B10).

Given Nasima becomes radicalised to terrorism, the character's motivation against her actions could be construed as being misaligned (much like in *Yasmin*), although rather than symbolically with a garment (the hijab), in Nasima's case there's an ideological disconnect. Nasima is not presented as being driven by religion or the cultural discrepancies between the West and Islam. She is presented as being driven by the injustice of governmental laws that negatively and disproportionately affect her community. The decision to take her from those origins and towards terrorism, either unconsciously or knowingly demonises the questioning of anti-terrorism legislation. It bodes the question; would a non-Muslim character in opposition to governmental powers in exercising anti-terror laws, also end up becoming a terrorist? It feels like a confused choice, to simultaneously give Nasima agency in standing up for her beliefs (against her brother) but then strip that agency in order to achieve a

narrative conclusion that befits the cultural imagination of Muslims. Nasima's gender is stereotyped initially in order for her to serve a caring, feminine role (doctor in training, coming to the aid of her younger brother), however this set up only seems to serve as a device for a more shocking twist – that a woman, and not a man, is the terrorist.

Her narrative/character arc

From the outset, Nasima is disturbed by what she views as the violation of rights facing her community (Pakistani-Muslims in Bradford). She's vocally opposed to and angered by the government's (then new) anti-terrorism legislation. Right from their introduction, Nasima and her older brother Sohail are reacting very differently to their environment and position in society as Muslims. Sohail secretly joins MI5 to assist counter-terrorism efforts. He is very much driven by the conviction that Islamic terrorism can be halted within the same, current political landscape in which it resides, with a desire to further integrate himself into the solid British identity towards which he aspires, very much trying to use the "master's tools" to dismantle his house (Lorde, 2018). Nasima's motivation becomes unconcerned with dismantling and more rather destroying completely, however once again, the depiction of the character (caring medical student pained by injustice) and the character's ensuing acts, feel steered by plot and not in-line with the character that has been established. Nasima is presented as being is in medical school – her first major act on screen sees her coming to the aid of her younger brother to remedy his bleeding face. She dresses not dissimilarly to her non-Muslim peers and she embraces many aspects of 'Western' culture; for example, she is frequently depicted as listening to Alternative/Rock music. When her family discover she is dating a Black British man, Jude, she is sent to Pakistan for an arranged marriage. Jude (played by Chinna Wodu) follows her to Pakistan, where he is attacked and imprisoned by her relatives. Sohail comes to her aid and intervenes for Jude's release, but by this point Nasima has already become entangled with the leader of an Islamic terrorist cell, who runs a training camp. Nasima becomes embroiled with the terrorist group, faking her own death in order to move between countries more freely. In doing so, she is able to undertake a suicide bombing mission, witnessed by Sohail, who had believed her to be dead.

Chasm between male and female Muslim character representation

Britz opens with two male characters walking centre frame through a corridor towards the forefront. They are in a hollow, echoey space, where doors line the passageway either

side. We could be in a prison, although the sound of a child's cries cushioning the men's heels clicking against the concrete suggests perhaps not. Although populated with diegetic sound, this is very much a liminal space, and to begin the film here means an immediate positioning of transience and momentum. The story is already moving, and we are at a narrative point where a transition between states is occurring. The men, a uniformed Caucasian man to the left of the frame (clothing suggesting a security guard or officer), and a suit-wearing south Asian man (Sohail) to the right, do not speak. As they reach the foreground, the uniformed male exists left, leaving us close-up on the South Asian male's fixed gaze towards the direction of the guard (00.11). At fifteen seconds, we see what lies ahead of them: a room, laid out like an infirmary with hard metal beds lining the sides of the frame, much like the doors in the previous shot. To the right, a draped curtain covers a portion of the frame, suggesting that something about this room is hidden, but we see enough to ascertain that this is not a usual hospital, if it is one at all – there is no visible medical equipment. Hijab-wearing women are dotted around on beds, along with men – all appearing to be brown-skinned from this mid-shot distance. A woman in a black abaya grazes a sweeping stick at the far end of the aisle, centred in the distant end of the frame, as a man dressed in blue nursing scrubs, also brown-skinned, crosses her path. We move through the room, again reinforcing this sense of liminal space that is being passed through. Positioned from the rear of Sohail, the frame is tightened yet detached; we take in the people on the beds either side more closely and claustrophobically, but we're passing through – we are consciously or unconsciously directed that the people on the beds are not to be related to, or with. The guard gestures to the right, a gap between the beds, and Sohail follows. In an adjoining room, to the right of the frame the floral pattering of the metal grating covering the windows is not congruent with British design – there is Arabic lettering on the grimy white wall to the left – we may not be in the UK. Bright sunlight managing to pierce through the grating appears to confirm this. Sohail turns to face the left of the frame, the frame tightens on his head and shoulders, he covers his nose with a white handkerchief – there is clearly a smell engulfing the space ahead. We follow behind him down another stale corridor, this one sparce with the exception of a man to the left of the frame in an off-white *shalwar kameez* [23]. Given the man's skin colouring, and that this type of garment is typically worn by men of

[23] Traditional South Asian clothing comprising of a loose-fitting top and loose trousers, worn by both men and women.

South Asian heritage, it is likely that along with previous visual indicators, we are in South Asia.

As the three characters in the frame part, with the guard and Sohail moving to the right, a gurney covered in a white sheet is revealed in the centre. The man in the *shalwar kameez* lifts it, there is a glimpse of a body, then the frame tightens on Sohail, who holds back a gag. The man in the *shalwar kameez* speaks two words, un-subtitled and not in English. The frame tightens further on Sohail, looking slightly above at him on the centre left; he stifles emotion initially, then looks down, overcome, and gently weeps. As spectators, positioned so intimately close to his uncontainable emotion, we are invited to empathise with him. At 1:10, the film indicates that this is 'Part One: Sohail's Story'.

With the opening of a new scene in a large classroom, tightening in on Sohail, we are shown several pieces of story-world information before hearing any dialogue. We are in a room with individual desks inhabited predominantly (but not exclusively) by Caucasian characters. It is likely we are now in the West. The expansive room encompasses high-reaching Georgian sash windows to the right of the frame, and oil painting portraits adorn the walls to the left and back of the frame, indicating the setting is in the UK. The circular hanging light fittings and thick blue curtains suggest this room is housed within a building of prestige – historically, given the visual period indicators, but also financially. The people (likely students taking an exam given the desk arrangement) are dressed in modern attire – t-shirts, cardigans, hooded jerseys – it is modern day and yet the historical building is well-maintained, which is notably costly. This contrast between the depictions is interesting, not merely for reasons of suggested progression and wealth of the UK in relation to the earlier scene in South East Asia, but in how we're set up to experience them. In moving through the corridors as liminal spaces, passing by people on beds as static objects, we are set up as transient observers; in the exam hall of the prestigious building, we are fixed in position as a base – as if we are set up as belonging in this space, as opposed to passing through. For visual fluidity, one would expect Nasima's relationship to her environment, particularly the outside world in the UK, to be depicted in liminal spaces, in the same way Sohail's is in South East Asia. This visual incoherence in the character's representations could be construed as a missed opportunity to demonstrate an understanding of Nasima's relationship to her environment – an opportunity to visually represent and demonstrate the complexity in the character's motivation.

Sohail, in a neatly buttoned navy top, writes with focus, as the title over indicates this is two months prior to our previous encounter of him. He finishes writing, cracks his

knuckles, and looks at his watch. Other students are still engrossed in writing, whilst Sohail has sailed through the exam with ease. The frame closes in on a young brown-skinned woman, looking towards Sohail with softness. The teacher/ instructor, who has been pacing the room, instructs the class to "stop writing', the first English dialogue (1:32). Students pile out of the building, the frame keeps Sohail close as he chats largely inaudibly to a female co-ed. Through a short dialogue exchange with a male co-ed, we discover that Sohail is travelling home at the weekend, and he's offered a lift to Bradford by the brown-skinned woman who was regarding him adoringly earlier. In the car, we learn that Sohail is going home to see his parents. He evades any personal questions, prompting her to ask Sohail with a sly but playful grin, "why are all your friends white?" In a tight close up, Sohail pauses briefly, looking away from her to the left of the frame. He appears not so much irked by the question, but tired of it, dispassionately replying that "they're not". Fanon (1986) comes to mind here, although Sohail's orchestrated proximity to whiteness is suggested in this scene to be a willing assimilation. *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon, 1986) understands something more deeply than Sohail's character is written to show – this proximity is a means of self-preservation.

Later, descending a bus, Sohail is recognised by a brown-skinned teenager in school uniform. The teenage boy has blood dripping down his face. Sohail, on noticing, quizzes with familiarity, "what the fuck happened to you?" The teenager responds nonchalantly in a Northern-English accent, "we got drunk, didn't we." It transpires that this is Sohail's brother, Rafiq, who has been attacked by someone who had waited for him and his friends at the school gates. Sohail asks whether Rafiq provoked the attack. Rafiq scoffs, declaring "I hate this fucking country," as he wipes the blood from his face. "No you don't, those people aren't this country, they're scum," Sohail replies with conviction, but Rafiq is not convinced.

The brothers arrive home, their mother, in a gold and red *shalwar khameez*, panics on seeing Rafiq, calling for Nasima. Sohail, centre frame, knocks on a bedroom door several times to no avail – he cannot compete with the loud pop-rock music from the room beyond. Finally, the door swings open, revealing Nasima tightly centred in the frame, in a long-sleeved cotton top with a small scarf around her neck, who angrily spits, "What?"

First characters speaking dialogue:

Unnamed man in *shalwar kameez*, as he reveals a cadaver on a gurney (0:44).

Instructor pacing exam hall tells student's to "stop writing." (1:32)

Sohail speaks fully audibly (1:53) turning down football training.

First female character speaks audibly (2:00) offering Sohail a lift.

Nasima speaks: (3:57) Opens her bedroom door angrily, alt-rock blaring behind her, saying to Sohail, “What?”

Percentage of Muslim women on screen in first 5 minutes (where religion is clear through clothing or character knowledge provided in the film): approx. 21.7%

Evidence of joy Number of seconds the character smiles within five minutes of screen time after being introduced (non-consecutive): >5 seconds.

3.1.4 **AISHA**

Fig.3.8 Leticia Wright as 'Aisha' in *My Brother the Devil* (2012)

The character Aisha is the only non-protagonist analysed in this section. Her inclusion is due to being the only visible Black Muslim female character featured in a British cinematic film, with a mainstream cinema release, within the ascribed year boundaries.

Who she is

Aisha is a Muslim girl of Somalian origin, who moves onto the estate where protagonists Mo and Rashid's family live. Aisha is privy to the violence in and around the community, however, believes it is possible to avoid. She is depicted as strong in character and conviction – she knows who she is and what she wants, and tries to encourage Mo to view things in the same way. She does not respond to peer pressure when questioned by Mo for not drinking alcohol or smoking like "most girls", responding, "I'm not most girls." Aisha is predominantly the love interest of Mo, whose journey serves as the dichotomy at the heart of the film's narrative. Of the character, director Sally El Hosaini states (Wilkinson, 2012):

> She's a really important character because there are girls like her. There is goodness. When I was pitching this project to people and I said it was set on a council estate in Hackney, I'd get, 'Oh, okay, I get it, dark, life is grim.' And I said, 'No, actually, because if you live on that council estate, you don't think its grim, because that's home.' It's really beautiful. There's still beautiful skies, there's flowers, there's grass, there's birds tweeting. There's love. That's what I discovered and that's what I'd like people to take from the film – these people love each other and there is love in these families. (Wilkinson, 2012)

We meet her

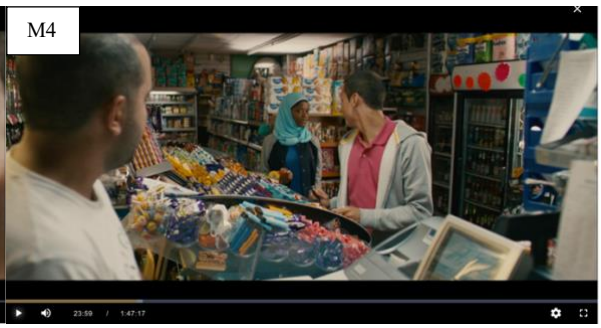
We first meet Aisha in the stairwell of the block of flats (*My Brother the Devil*, 2012, 21:51), passing Mo and a white male character to the right of the frame. The use of a passageway space is to different effect from Sohail's introduction in *Britz*. In this liminal space the characters interact with each other, rather than moving through the space and passing people (as objects). They are in a vacuum of sorts, in a space in-between places. The exchange is presented as playful and typical to characters of that age. In this 'in-between' where they are neither at home nor fully outside, they are most free to be their natural selves – young people noticing each other and taking a liking to one another, minus the complications and inflicted identities and personas of their home or 'street' lives. We're close enough to see all three characters' faces during this brief encounter, although we are predominantly positioned to notice Aisha from Mo's perspective (M1). The space in which this interaction takes place feels aptly fitting; when the setting does not impose expectations on the characters, they are shown as most authentically themselves. As Aisha passes out of the frame, the boys' gawking continues, leading to a distant shot of Aisha and another character unloading a transit van (M2). The boys are intrigued – the white character more vocally so, whilst Mo watches with silent interest.

M1

M2

M3

M4

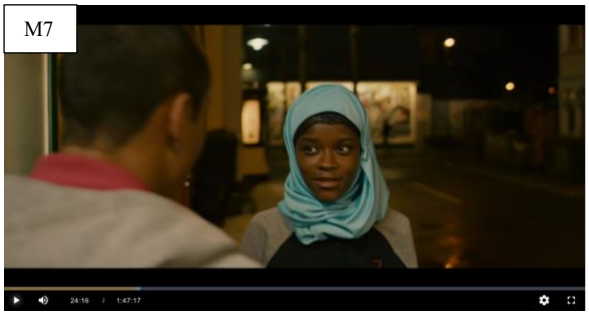


Aisha appears again in the corner shop where Mo is sent to top up the household's electricity card (23:53). Amused when a teenage female customer is refused a child travel card, Aisha and Mo share a smirk (24:04), Mo exits the frame, and Aisha steps closer up to the counter, gaze fixed on the exiting Mo – her smile solid (she likes him) – before she turns her attention back to the shopkeeper (24:08). The frequent diagonal placing of the two characters within the frame (M3) often results in the gap between them narrowing, if not in actual physical distance, in the way they appear in the frame (M5). Although not a protagonist, being the object of Mo's affection often places Aisha at the centre of our gaze (M6, M7).

M5

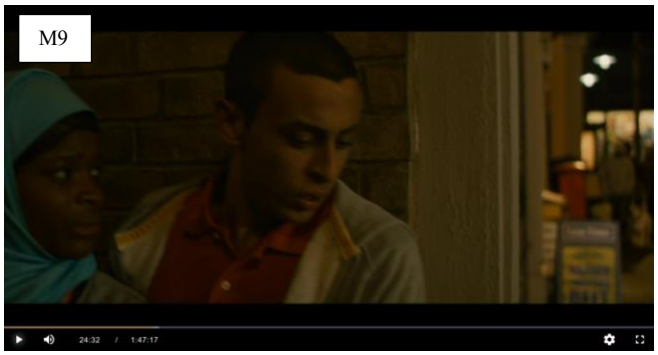
M6

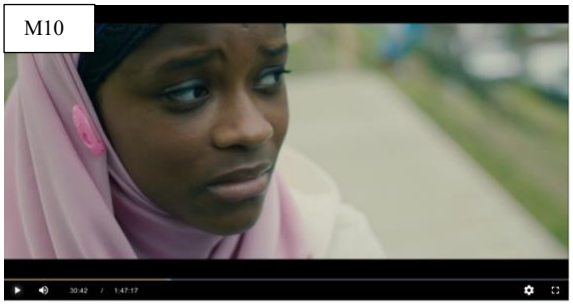
M7



M8

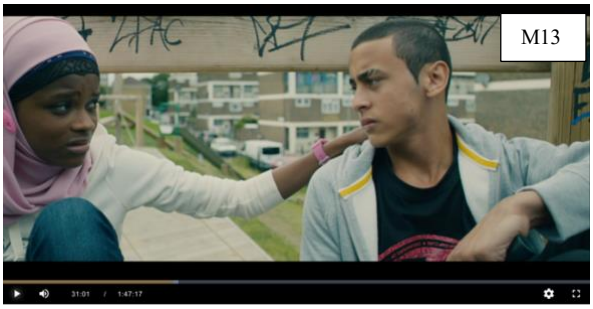
Mo waits for Aisha outside the shop. He speaks to her first, asking if she's new (24:20). She responds she's new, from Edgeware. Within this story of 'others' in the context of the UK, Aisha is an outsider coming into Mo's world. They're about to part ways, when Mo spots rivals of his brother's turn the corner, so he grabs Aisha's arm. She's disturbed – he takes her round a corner to hide in safety (24:32). He phones his brother, but when Aisha asks "what's happening," Mo initially tells her, "nothing.". Within the frame, Mo stands between Aisha and the fight around the corner (M9). A wooden frame on edge of a wall separates them both from the fight. Mo does not cross the threshold to join the violence – at this point he is not yet a participant, but teetering close to the edge. Aisha and Mo witness the gang fight and a murder.


M9

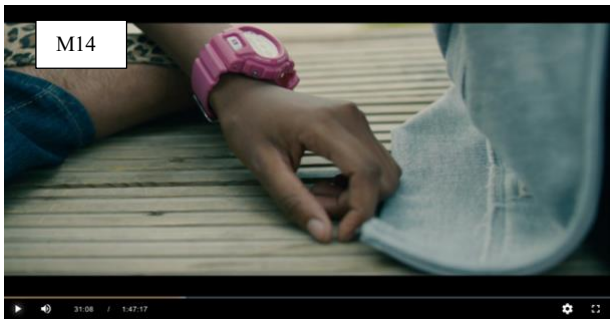

M10


M11


M12


M13

Following the incident, Aisha consoles Mo (M11). A pathway separates them between the frame, which Aisha attempts to bridge across (M12). Mo contemplates (M13) but ultimately resists her advice, at which point her arm retreats and falls to the floor, the edges of her fingers just about grazing his hoody as he slips out of reach, resigning himself to the violence of gang life (M14). The tenderness in the contact between the two, more so with Aisha having the agency in the frame and reaching Mo, is a unique representation for a Muslim female character on screen, particularly given they are opposite genders, and not a (married) couple. There's a sense that modernity is at play in this tender interaction – the bright watch on Aisha's wrist is prominent and perhaps literal – times are different and as such they are behaving like young people in a modern world.



AISHA: subsequent scene stills

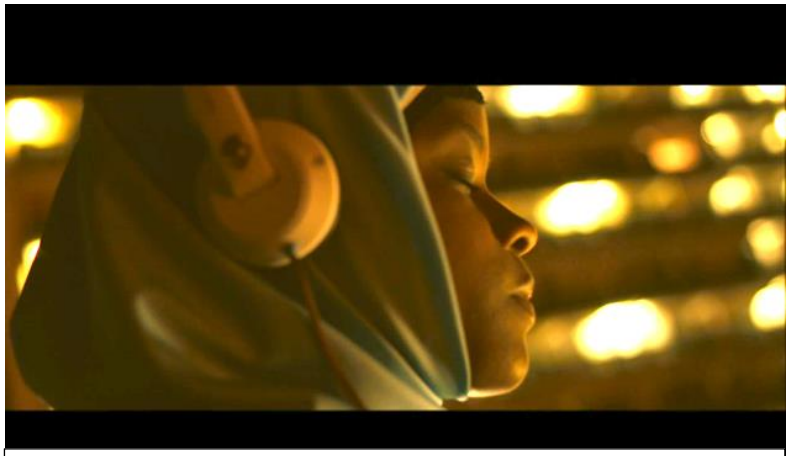


Fig.3.9 Aisha is visually presented as having an inner, private character dimension.

Fig.3.10 Horizontal division of the frame – the estate versus the sky. In the foreground out of focus, Mo is shown regarding Aisha as 'larger than' his current life – an exit point from which he can flee the dangers within the estate.

Fig.3.11 Aisha is positioned as a 'sparkle of hope' from Mo's perspective.

Fig.3.12 The light in the background marks the energy and warmth running between Aisha and Mo.

Fig.3.16 Aisha as object of spectatorship through Mo.

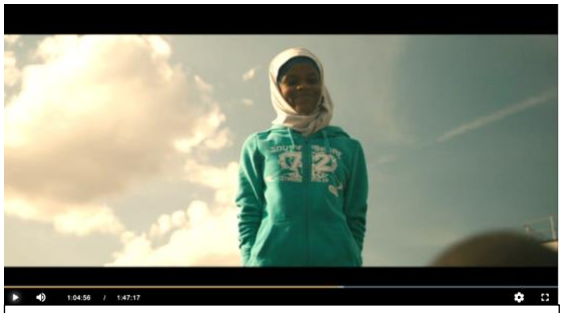
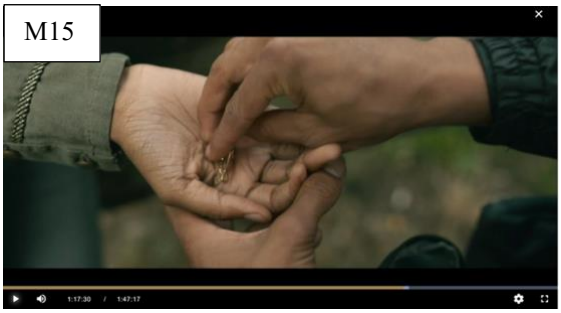


Fig.3.14 Aisha, positioned surrounded by the sky, able to exist completely free from the troubles within the estate.

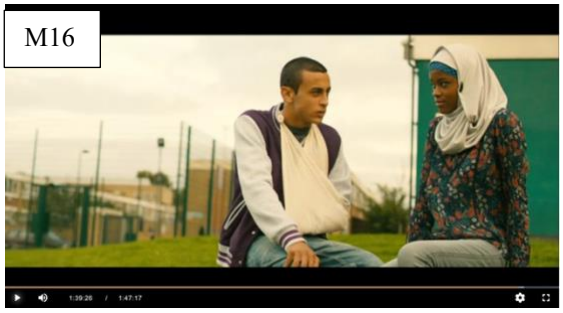
Fig.3.15 Aisha as mediator.

Fig.3.13 Aisha positioned as a figure of mediation.

M15



M16



M17

Her narrative/character arc

Whilst moving into her new home in a tower block in East London where protagonists Mo and Rashid's family live, Aisha is noticed in the stairwell by Mo and a friend. Later, in the local corner shop, Aisha and Mo share a smile when a teenage girl tries to purchase a child travel ticket and is denied. Mo waits for her outside, and when she exists, they introduce themselves. Together they witness a gang fight, involving Mo's older brother Rashid, where his best friend, Izzi, is killed. Aisha grows concerned for Mo and tries to persuade him away from gang life. They continue to spend time together, growing a gentle, delicate regard for one another. Given Aisha is Mo's love interest, her narrative arc serves towards his character's internal and external conflict as he cascades into the life his brother has set the path towards.

When Mo offers her a gift of a gold necklace (M15), Aisha refuses to accept it, knowing his foray into drug dealing has paid for it. She expresses disliking the 'boys' he has been hanging around with, but inevitably her pull is not strong enough to keep him from the life of violence he has inherited. After Mo is shot protecting his brother Rashid, he apologises to Aisha for the way he has been acting. In her final scene, she agrees to allow Mo to knock for her later – she returns to occupying space in the frame, in a position for spectatorship through Mo's perspective, suggesting there's a hope yet for their blossoming relationship (M16, M17).

Despite the open ending with promise, certain factors are not fully addressed or explored, such as what Aisha's reaction would have been, had Mo disclosed that he had witnessed his brother in a homosexual relationship. Mo's avoidance with his friends and those who know his brother makes sense – more so in terms of his brother's social 'gang' status, but

also in terms of his parents' religious beliefs. Aisha is presented as different; Mo is open with her and is seen to confide in her. She is a hijabi but otherwise gives no strong sense of conservative views or behaviour. She is out alone at night in the corner shop, she socialises outside with the opposite sex at night, and she's happy to sit with them whilst they drink alcohol and smoke (although she does not partake herself). Given the character picture that has been built, it is not a given that she would feel strongly enough about homosexuality for Mo not to be able to tell her. This is in contradiction with the fact that visually, she is given an inner dimension (*Fig.3.9*). This contradiction then, exists within the film – an incongruence between the visual and the script. In terms of her narrative arc, she is not given that autonomous private self, but instead is reduced to a function Mo's character arc. This lack of character verisimilitude/ consistency between her visual and narrative presentation may well be the result or the symptom of the fact that she is, as a character, a function of another (male) character.

Alternatively, this choice could have less to do with Aisha's character and her potential reaction, and more to do with Mo simply wanting to protect his brother's privacy. It gives the sense of being swerved for ease however, as it would force certain questions regarding Islam and homosexuality to be confronted. Perhaps as El Hosaini was presenting a hybrid identity in Aisha that was rare on screen (Black Female British Muslim), there was a reluctance to risk attributing characteristics to the rarely seen Black Muslim female. If Aisha voiced views either in support of, or in opposition to, Rashid's homosexuality, it could possibly be attributed to a homogenous opinion held by all Black (Somali) Muslim girls and women. Sally El Hosaini is not a Black woman, but even had she been, the weight of attaching an ideological view that is either incompatible with the conservative side of the religious culture from which the character is from, or attaching an incompatible ideology with the wider British culture within which the character lives, is understandably avoided if not integral to the story. As Dorrett Jones notes in the essay 'Through our lens: filming our resistance':

> [when] Black women are seen, looked at and viewed, be it still or moving image, then we are also consumed and understood as that image through another's lens. Therefore if we are to create our own visual imagery and representations, then it is useful to consider how those images could be interpreted. (2019, pp.273-283)

This consideration may be the case for El Hosaini's choices in terms of Aisha, however the result, in places, is a character who is not wholly three-dimensional – we know what Aisha is, but not who she is.

Chasm between male and female Muslim representation

Unlike the other examples, Aisha is a featured character, as opposed to a protagonist, therefore it stands to reason that her character is not afforded as much screen time, narrative progression and depth as the (male) protagonists. Instead of a relational comparison to the male characters and Aisha, this section explores more broadly the handling of the introductions of male and female characters in the film.

Opening with black and white, documentary style stills, the first frame centres a mixed gender group of young Black teenagers, on a small grassy knoll in front of metal fencing, a basketball court, and the jagged skyline of high-rise London buildings at night. We have no indication of religion until 03:06, when on arriving home (to a high rise flat), Mo is greeted by his mother, who wears a headwrap, and speaks in Arabic[24]. Our first moving shot, closely centred from below, shows one of the two male protagonists (Rashid), throwing boxing-gloved fists into a punch bag. At 00:49 we meet our second protagonist (Mo) in school uniform, again, centred, this time straight on at a more observatory distance, suggesting an enforced closer positionality with Rashid's character – he is the one who's journey we're to more closely relate with. Rashid is the older of the two brothers, and Mo, the younger, has the most narrative interaction with Aisha. This almost immediately places Aisha's narrative role as even furtherly functional – if we are watching Mo through Rashid's lens, we are positioned at even more of an observational distance watching Aisha (*Fig.3.16*), who largely interacts with Mo. At no point in the narrative are we set up for deep consideration of the inner workings of Aisha, which is understandable – she is not a main character in this story. Having said this is 'understandable', it must also be recognised as a choice on the part of the filmmaker and those involved in the film. As discussed previously, there were aspects of the character left unexplored, and this omission appears incongruent to the way Aisha and Mo's relationship had been presented. The juxtaposition of black and white stills and moving image establishing shots of the protagonists, contextualises them as characters in this real, 'urban' London. The opening five minutes depict a reasonably high proportion of screen time representation of a Muslim

[24] Including the phrase 'Alhamdullilah', a common Arabic phrase associated with Islam, meaning 'praise be to God'.

female character (approximately thirty seconds), considering the narrative centres around the two brothers.

First character speaking dialogue: Rashid greeting Mo (02:07) “Yo, what you sayin’, huh?”

Aisha speaks: (24:18) Responding to Mo with her name.

Percentage of Muslim women on screen in first 5 minutes:
8%

Evidence of joy: Number of seconds the character smiles within five minutes of screen time after being introduced (non-consecutive): approx. 16 seconds.

3.1.5 **MONA**

Fig.3.17 Aiysha Hart as 'Mona' in *Honour* (2014)

Who she is

Mona, a South Asian British Muslim in her early twenties, is planning to run away from her family with her non-Muslim (Punjabi) boyfriend. Mona ends up on the run after her family find out and hire a hitman to kill her, in order to reinstate their honour within their community.

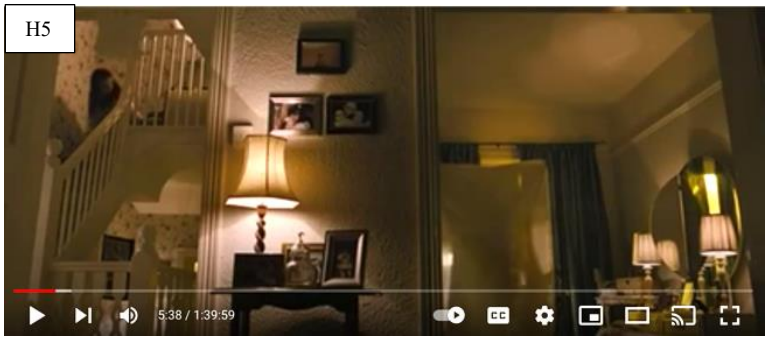
We meet her

Mona cautiously opens the front door to the house (*Honour*, 2014, 3:18). She peeks through the crack in the door, listening fearfully before stepping in (H1). Whilst she is entering the family home, she is doing so via a hallway. Again, as in *Britz* and *My Brother the Devil*, we see the way a liminal space is used as a threshold between two worlds for the characters. In Mona's case, returning home and crossing the hallway means her leaving the freedom of the world outside, and transitioning into the clutches of her mother and brother (H2).

She turns back to retrieve something on the other side of the front door, then returns. The item, a suitcase, is hidden under the stairs. The spectator is placed closely with Mona's point of view (H3) as she lifts the suitcase, indicating that it is her experience we are relating with. Mona turns her attention up the stairs where her mother awaits. Incongruencies in Mona's character motives feel less to do with in-attentivity to authenticity, and more to do with the reliance on plot for the thriller genre. Certain story beats and character attributes were needed to serve the plot in a manner that is in keeping with the genre. Without this reliance on meeting the conventions of the genre, perhaps there would be more room for closer scrutiny and questioning of Mona's situation: why did she bother returning home first before eloping? If she is allowed out to work late outside of the home, and is able to elope, why not have just moved out from home in the first place?

Mona lingers silently behind her mother, who we had seen previously (this character is not named, despite featuring in a prominent role in the film). Without turning to face Mona, her mother speaks to her in Urdu. Mona responds in English. Her brother will not be working as planned that evening, foiling her plans to leave. The cold behaviour of her mother borders on caricature – she is very much set up from the beginning as cold-blooded and evil. Her only motivation is the shame her daughter is causing the family by being with a non-Muslim boyfriend. To lay the responsibility for this flattening of character solely at the door of the genre would imply that it is not possible to depict nuanced characters within the thriller genre, which is of course untrue. However, the narrative and character choices position *Honour* as a thriller using the concept of honour killings as the spectacle for the plot, rather than a thriller exploring the psychology of honour killings themselves.

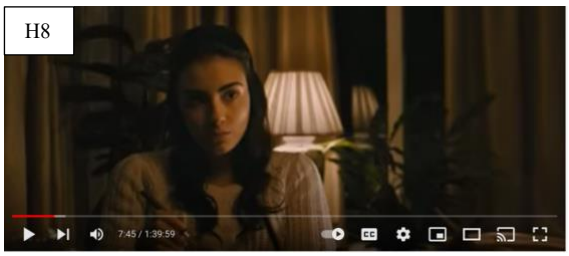
H5



H6

H7

H8



For much of the character's introductory five minutes on screen, Mona is positioned at opposite ends from her mother and brother in the frame (H6, H7), often with a physical barrier between them (e.g., a wall, a doorframe, a table). Her mother's coldness – her stern facial expression and the non-eye contact with her daughter – permeates the space between them. The danger lurking in the air is established, extending to a(n uncharacteristic) moment of Mona considering brandishing the cooking knife left on the side by her mother. By flattening the characters and their situation, and removing the nuances of their motivations, the result is a more clear-cut thriller. We know who the 'baddies' are. It could be argued that giving the mother a more rounded personality would muddy and confuse the plot and the expectations of the genre. The mother's motivation towards the murder of her own daughter is also a less complex, less sympathetic situation. In the case of *Britz*, Nasima's starting point was responding to the injustice of her community, which is arguably relatable at that point. There is no room culturally to relate to murdering one's own child. It's a fearful situation to reckon with, and allowing any nuance forces a reckoning that may lead to further discomfort – perhaps we don't always need to know why people do terrible things, we just need to put a stop to them. Whether you can successfully stop something that isn't understood is another matter. The flattening of both Mona and her mother direct the cultural imagination towards a specific set of ideas. Whether intended or not, if the general characterisation of (South Asian) Muslim mothers on screen has been that of a background character, then in one of the few depictions where she is brought to the forefront, she is murderous and evil, certain (unconscious) conclusions about South Asian mothers could be made.

Her narrative/character arc

Mona, of South Asian Pakistani origin, lives with her mother and brother in West London. Her boyfriend is a non-Muslim, British-Punjabi man – her family do not approve, and as such, Mona and he have plans to elope. Their plans are ruined when her mother and brother find out, and decide that she must be killed to preserve their honour[25]. Mona goes on the run to

[25] The act of 'honour killing' is a severe, violent crime against women, where a girl or woman is murdered by family members (father, mother, brothers, uncles, or grandparents) or community members, due to disapproved sexual behaviour. The definition of 'sexual behaviour' varies in differing communities; it usually includes sex outside of marriage/ before marriage, but can also include flirting, refusing arranged marriage and being raped. The (perceived) transgression is viewed as disrespecting or dishonouring traditions and bringing dishonour onto the family or community. In murdering the woman or girl, the family members seek to restore the honour of their family or community (Heydari, Teymoori, and Trappes, 2021, pp.87-88).

escape her family, who have enlisted a bounty hunter to locate her (who ultimately ends up helping her). The choice for Mona's boyfriend to be of Punjabi, non-Muslim origin, as opposed to Caucasian, frees space for the white hitman (played by Paddy Considine) and eventual saviour of Mona, to be more clearly positioned as the solution and the saviour – this is an issue between 'others' which he steps in to fix.

Chasm between male and female Muslim representation

A leafy countryside scene is disturbed by a commuter train slicing the frame across its tracks. Two white characters ascend the train aisle; one of them, a young woman, clutches a glass-bottled beverage, the man behind has a closely shaven head. Whilst we do not have a specific indication of time, the daylight suggests it is either the morning or afternoon, although unlikely to be rush hour as the train is not packed with passengers in typical professional work attire. The young woman's beer, along with the hoodies and t-shirts worn by herself and her companion, rightly or wrongly encourage a specific reading of the characters – it is daytime and they are not at work/ they are drinking on a train/ they are dressed scruffily – these characters may be trouble. Two hijab-wearing women, in complete black abayas, stand ahead on opposite aisles (00:48).

The frame closes on the young woman ascending the train aisle, looking with gleeful menace towards the hijabed women. A baby fusses. A young boy wearing a *taqiyah*[26] looks up to the top of the frame with wide eyes – he recognises the danger of the situation. The man and woman reach the row where the hijabed women chatter in non-subtitled, non-English. A little girl alerts her mother, one of the hijabi women, who turns and apologises earnestly to the man and woman for blocking their path. The man burps in her face and laughs, his companion laughs, too. The hijabed woman responds, "I beg your pardon," which irks the man, whose mocking demeanour escalates to anger in a split second, as he demands, "where are we?" The tension between the characters snaps and the man and woman's venom is fully unleashed – the situation shifts from bullish attitude to dangerous. The glass-bottle-clutching woman demands that the hijabed women "speak English!" Another white passenger turns and coughs to intervene, only to be silenced by the woman. Tension escalates, the hijabi women attempt to diffuse the situation, which angers the couple further, and they end up shouting and spraying the women with beer from the bottle. From the outset it is established that

[26] A Taqiyah cap is a rounded skull cap, often worn by Muslim men during prayer.

within this story world, the aggressors are clear-cut and on-the-nose. Motivational nuance is not a priority for the characters – importance is placed instead on demonstrating very clearly an aggressor and a victim. This facilitates the only character with a developed narrative arc and emotional and circumstantial shift, the unnamed hitman (played by Paddy Considine). *Honour* is about his character's journey, from circumstantial aggressor as a hitman, towards redemption.

We meet Mona's mother before her, tight on her face as the sewing machine she is working on churns in the background. In *Britz*, during the opening five minutes, we see Nasima's mother sewing too, although in her case darning with a needle, so perhaps repairing items as opposed to creating a garment. This could be read in many ways; that women of a certain age, regardless of cultural identity or race, when not engaged in any other activity in the home, take up sewing. Or that women of a certain age within a home setting are handy and industrious, fixing and making for their families. It could be read, within the parameters of these case studies, that this is specifically typical of South Asian women, or South Asian Muslim women. The manual craft of sewing and needlework raises connotations of resourcefulness, in repairing to save money and make items last longer or go further, and also harks back to a previous time, pre-fast fashion, when women would perhaps be more inclined to make their own clothing. That Mona's mother is using a machine rather than a needle, removes the delicateness of the act of sewing somewhat – a large, loud machine gives the sense of being less 'hands on' and homely. It is a step removed from being handmade, which mirrors the character's detachment – she is obstructed and removed from being a nurturing mother. Even whilst alone, away from other characters, the mother is always stern-looking. This leaves no room for doubt whatsoever, that there is no inner conflict in terms of whether killing her daughter is the right thing to do, there is no turmoil surrounding whether it is something she feels she is actually capable of. This clear-cut representation of the mother as unapologetically, unreflectively murderous, removes the need to explore the patriarchal roots of the practice; honour killing is about the social control of women "exercised in tightly-knit communities, in which women's sexuality and social behaviors are key communal values and resources" (Heydari, Teymoori and Trappes, 2021, pp.87-88). The mother exists within and is a product of a framework, a system not of her own making – defeating any individual does not erase the social problem. Reducing complex social ills into narrative structures to represent a hero's journey (in this case, the hitman) always risks confusing the cultural imagination into believing that these problems which exist insidiously within a social fabric, can be defeated using an individualistic approach.

First characters speaking dialogue: Hijabi woman on train, (01:12) “Oh sorry!” to the aggressive passengers.

Mona speaks: (04:37) Responding in English, “Your material?” to her mother speaking Urdu.

Percentage of Muslim women on screen in first 5 minutes: approx. 50%

Evidence of joy Number of seconds the character smiles within five minutes of screen time after being introduced (non-consecutive): 0 seconds.

3.1.6 **MARY**

Fig.3.18 Joanna Scanlan as 'Mary' in *Afterlove* (2020).

Who she is

Mary is a recent widower and white-British, Muslim revert[27], who, in years prior, lost a son at four months old. After her husband's funeral, she discovers he was in contact with a woman whom she'd never encountered, so she embarks across the English Channel to France in order to track her down.

We meet her

A Caucasian hijabi woman, Mary, enters a dark kitchen and switches on the light (*Afterlove*, 2020, 00:35). She is followed by a South Asian man, Ahmed, presumably her partner given the natural demeanour of the two. They aren't speaking, in a manner suggesting familiarity and comfort with one another, and their clothing culturally matches (her hijab and *abaya*, his *shalwar kameez*). He exits to a different room, as she advances to occupy the kitchen space (A1). She places a kettle on the stove, then removes her hijab (A2) and hangs it on a hook on the wall (00:54). Removing it at this point is interesting to explore. It is correct that in the house, in front of her husband, Mary would not be required to cover her head. There are also instances where wearing a hijab within the home would be impractical – washing for example, or cooking where the hijab may get in the way. Mary's hijab is worn loosely, it does not appear constricting or uncomfortable looking. It is also a lightweight fabric, unlikely to be a source of too much heat. She is preparing to boil a kettle to make tea, which could be argued is not an activity where the hijab would likely cause too much obstruction. Much like Yasmin's introductory scenes in *Yasmin*, Mary's hijab here seems to serve as a prop for spectatorship – attention is being drawn to it hanging on the wall (A3), leaving room to interpret her choice to remove it at the earliest opportunity. Removing it at this point, and the possible interpretation

[27] The term 'revert' is rooted in the Islamic belief that every child is born a Muslim, therefore individuals of other faiths who convert to Islam, are 'reverting' to their religion of birth. (Sturm. 2017,p.7)

of meaning behind that, could appear misaligned with what we later discover about Mary. She remains a Muslim even after her husband dies, she does not cease to practise Islam. Removing the hijab here does not feel in line with the suggestion it makes, that she is wanting to remove it from her person as soon as she is in her own home. This could also be interpreted as her merely removing it as an item of clothing, in the same way one would remove a hat or neck scarf – it has served its purpose for outside of the house, and is no longer needed now that she is inside. It is worth noting however, that we do not see her remove any other clothing at this point.

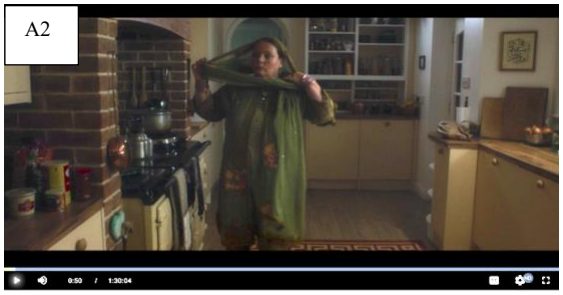
Mary checks some Tupperware pots of food to respond to her husband's question, "What did we get?" (01:02), and remains there, on the same side of the frame as her husband, as they discuss the contents of what we understand to be leftovers from where they have arrived home from. She opens the fridge, storing the Tupperware and retrieving milk for the tea. She moves to the right of the frame to the sink, and faces out of the dark window (01:27). Her husband plays some South Asian music. She chuckles whilst washing her hands, then looks back at him in the other room. He sings along and she eventually joins him too, moving onto the washing up. Mary comments disliking "when they shave the girls", and despite Ahmed explaining the hair grows back quicker, she replies, "I know, I just don't like to see it." When he declares it's no different to dipping babies in water to baptise them, Mary shakes her head, turning towards the left of the frame in his direction to put him straight – babies are not baptised by dunking. This exchange is indicative of a dynamic that signposts what is to come, that Mary is the one in their relationship to compromise, change and adapt, in order to meet in a position closer to him, but he has not made the same compromises for her. They are somewhat separate until she goes towards him, both physically in their positioning in the framing of this scene (A4), but also within the emotional and psychological workings of their relationship. Her husband's secret – his separate life and lack of compromise for her, perhaps asks how much of this is his 'male-ness' and how much is his 'Islam-ness'. This is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to untangle. He is both male and Muslim, and both are factors. The secrets she discovers he has kept are not a direct result of his religion. There is no religious reason he hid his other family from Mary. It would not be against his religion to have more than one family at a time (although he would need to marry each and the wives would be aware of one another, but even then it would not strictly be legal in the UK). Equally he did not do so *because* he is male – it is not inherently male to harbour secret families. Ahmed did so because he could, both (a)morally, in terms of his character and personality, and socially, because neither his

gender nor religion hindered him. A woman would find it much more difficult to disguise having a second, secret family, the logistics would be virtually impossible.

Mary continues to speak, walking back and forth within the frame, continuing to occupy this domestic space with ease and comfort, musing to her husband and not noticing he has stopped responding. She lifts cups of tea and walks towards him (2:50), eventually facing him (A5). Ahmed still does not respond, and for a final time, she attempts to meet him more closely to where he is, physically moving into him and calling his name (03:08). With still no response, she bends towards him further. The music stops – all is silent in the frame. She kneels into him, and although he is obscured from the frame by a wall, we realise he has died.

A1

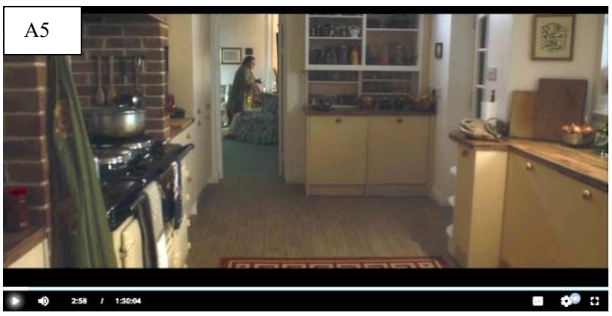
A2



A3

A4

A5



The scene fades silently to black, until the sounds of women reciting prayers in Arabic are laced with just-about-audible weeping. The frame fades into Mary, sat on a sofa and centred in a white abaya, book-ended either side by hijabed women in dark fabric (A6, A7). Partial bodies of men standing can be seen in the top left of the frame, who loom on the edges of this otherwise women's space. Mary's positioning, and the focus the bright white abaya draws, is a centring unusual in my case studies. Being alone in white, Mary is simultaneously 'othered' and elevated from the women surrounding her. However, this 'othering', which primarily occurs in terms of abaya colour (the starkness of the white abaya against the dark clothing of all the other women), is presented unusually. The 'othered' object is often on the outside, rather than the centre – the 'othered' usually exists on the periphery. The positioning here is perhaps more of alienation and reflective of Mary's feelings, rather than feelings *towards* her. Mary is the protagonist of this story, therefore positioning an audience as with her, much like a close third person perspective in literature, makes sense – the audience are being positioned to closely relate with her, not merely to observe her. This is still an unusual position to place an audience when presenting a Muslim female character. Even in *Yasmin* (2004) the eponymous main character is introduced in a manner where we are positioned as spectators – in those scenes where we get to know Yasmin, we are positioned to watch her from some distance, rather than embody her experience.

A6

A7

The frame slowly tightens on Mary. The women around her weep openly, yet she is restrained (04.15). The male mourners engulf the sofa in single file – the man at the front stands to the right of the frame and above the seated Mary (04:19). She clasps his hand in hers, looking upwards at him as prayer beads dangle between them (A8, A9). He tells her to "Take comfort. They're together now" (04:36), indicating another previous loss.

There is a suggestion in these scenes of religious patriarchy; vertical and horizontal movements – up to down from male to woman, and left to right between women. Framing in this way emphasises these patriarchal dynamics, presenting the men as towering figures of

authority, rather than individuals (their heads and faces are not seen in the frame). This positioning appears to be for the spectators benefit in understanding the men's role, although there's a suggestion that Mary's inner perspective has shifted once she returns to sit with the women on the sofa. Once the man's words have been spoken but seemingly not offered comfort, Mary appears reflective (A10). She leans back into the sofa and looks at her hands – the hands that reached out but did not 'receive'. As the women around her weep more audibly, those same hands which she had clasped around the man to seek support (which did not materialise), now change in function, into a gesture of female friendship. This also places Mary as providing a support to others that she is not receiving herself. She extends a silent hand to those on the left of the frame, and without averting her gaze from straight ahead, she extends a hand to the weeping character on the right (04:53), again a horizontal exchange as opposed to the vertical exchange with the man previously. Mary is visibly saddened, but still not allowing tears to fall. The frame closes in, tighter and tighter (A11), as Mary wrestles with the emotion she appears to be so desperately containing, as those around her fall apart (05.11).

A8

A9

A10

Her narrative/character arc

On returning home together from a family gathering one evening, Mary's husband dies suddenly and unexpectedly. After his funeral Mary discovers a photograph of a woman within her husband's belongings. She later discovers message exchanges with this woman on her late husband's phone. Mary decides to take a ferry to find the woman, Genevieve. On meeting, Genevieve mistakes Mary for a cleaner, and invites her into the family's home. Genevieve and her teenage son have plans to move within days, and Mary resolves to pose as a cleaner, to find out more information about Genevieve's relationship with her husband. Mary finds a home video which confirms that Ahmed fathered the teenager, Solomon, and that he has had a secret family in Genevieve and Solomon for many years. Neither Genevieve nor Solomon are aware that Ahmed is dead. Mary discovers that Genevieve was aware that Ahmed had another wife, although he had told her that his wife was Pakistani and that they had never had children. Mary messages Solomon from Ahmed's phone, prompting Solomon to ask to live with him. After a heated argument which culminates in Mary slapping Solomon, she reveals that Ahmed is dead, which is confirmed when Solomon calls Ahmed's phone and it rings on Mary's person. Genevieve throws Mary out. Later the three cross paths at Ahmed's grave leading to a conciliation of sorts. Mary gives Solomon a tape Ahmed had made for her.

Chasm between male and female Muslim representation

In keeping with the style of this section I will explore the film's opening, however, given Mary is the protagonist, it stands to reason that she features more prominently in the opening than characters in some previous examples. *After Love* was also made later than the other films, which may have affected the manner in which a female character's narrative is presented on screen. That is not to say that time alone is a guarantee of 'progress' in attitudes towards gender or race, however progression of time alters landscapes – for example, a film

made in 2020 in the UK is likely more susceptible to debate concerning diversity and female representation following political movements such as '#MeToo'[28]. That Mary is a Caucasian Muslim woman may also have an influence in the treatment of her narrative as the protagonist of a feature film, and the manner in which she is positioned to be spectated.

First characters speaking dialogue: Husband asks Mary, "what did we get?" (00:59)

Mary speaks: Responding to Ahmed, "Sag Aloo." (01:02)
Percentage of Muslim women on screen in first 5 minutes
100%

Evidence of joy - number of seconds the character smiles within five minutes of screen time after being introduced (non-consecutive): approx. 7 seconds.

[28] In the wake of allegations of sexual abuse perpetuated in Hollywood by Harvey Weinstein, the '#MeToo' movement went viral on social media and beyond. The movement and hashtag was created a decade previously in 2006 by Tarana Burke, to help victims of sexual violence and abuse. (Bhattacharyya, 2018, pp.2-3)

3.2 THE INTERSECTION OF 'BLACK', 'MUSLIM' AND 'WOMAN' WITHIN BRITISH CINEMA AND THE CULTURAL IMAGINATION BEYOND

3.2.1 The Muslim woman: an overview

Determining the causes or socio-historical factors of the presence of Muslim female characters in British films in recent years is not the objective of this thesis. My focus remains the nature and degree of their presence and narrative functions as characters – in order to feed the analysis into my script. That said, in what follows I advance tentative suggestions as to some of the factors that may have impacted and shaped these representations.

To date, there are more Muslims represented on screen in British cinema than any previous time. However, it would be remiss to present this without also acknowledging the issue of nuance that is especially prominent in depictions of women (Khan, 2020). The narrow parameters of Muslim female representation have given rise to dominant, repetitive representations of the Muslim woman as a character in British cinema. For example, one of the dominant representations of British Muslim female characterisation on screen, is that she is of South Asian descent. Towards the beginning of the time period considered here, South Asian people made up 4% of the total population of the UK, and 50% of the UK's non-white population (Iqbal, 2012). According to data from the 2001 Census, 74% of Muslims in the UK were South Asian (Indian, Bangladeshi or Pakistani). The groups most likely to be Muslim were of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin[29]. The Census also showed that 50% of South Asian people are Muslim, meaning that, according to the census, half of South Asians in the UK are not Muslim (Maxwell, 2006). It stands to reason that a majority of British Muslim female characters on screen during the time period of my case studies would be depicted as South Asian. In the census closest to the commencement of the time period, 50% of South Asian people identified as Muslims and 74% of Muslims overall were of South Asian descent. That the percentage of characterised heritage on screen is exactly reflective of the population is not expected – art does not accurately and succinctly reflect life. That said, filmmakers and producers are aware of a need to appeal to audiences and their social 'make-up'. It could be argued that there has been emergence of an established second or third generation of South Asian people, with perhaps greater disposable income than their parents and more UK education, who are more aware of and sensitive towards issues of race and representation.

[29] 92% of the UK population of Bangladeshi or Pakistani heritage identified as Muslims (Maxwell, 2006).

Industry awareness of this audience in terms of the Muslim population's demographics, could also serve to explain a focus of inclusion more on South Asian populations over, say, Somali and Nigerian Muslims, which make up the largest Black Muslim population. The discussion of representation continues nonetheless, despite population figures – as inclusion itself is merely the tip of the iceberg amongst calls for nuance.

To delve further from the perspective of immigration, in *We're Here Because You Were There* (2021a), Ian Sanjay Patel explores the history of post-WW2 migration in terms of the British empire, looking at the movement of Commonwealth citizens in relation to the United Kingdom, and in particular, following the 1948 British Nationality Act (pp.4-6). Part of the book focuses on South Asian migration in the post-war period, including the 1968 Kenyan South Asian crisis and the 1972 Ugandan South Asian crisis (Patel, 2021a, pp.189-243). Firstly, of note: movement to the 'West' of South Asian populations has taken place concurrently with the movement of African populations. "South Asians as indentured labourers were moved from India to the so-called sugar colonies after the abolition of slavery, and Indian immigrants were encouraged to settle in the British East Africa Protectorate" (Patel, 2021b). The book examines racial discrimination and resistance towards, at the parlance of the time, "coloured immigrants" (Patel, 2021a, p.17), and explores how governmental policy was engineered to hinder and block entry (2021a). Patel describes the crossing of South Asian and African populations – particularly in the case of East Africa. This does not offer a specific argument in support of or opposition to the representation on Muslim identities in British Cinema, but it does highlight the complexities of heritage and origin which become flattened or simplified when viewed in the context of the UK. From a colonial-leaning UK lens, there appears to be a difficulty in recognising cultural intersections. So, for example, South Asian Kenyans are not a visible identity in my case studies (and beyond). However, in terms of immigration, this particular group would have formed a significant proportion of South Asian Muslims in the UK.

There are of course non-South Asian depictions of Muslim women on screen, as demonstrated earlier in this chapter. The character Aisha in *My Brother the Devil*, for instance, is of Somali descent (although the actress portraying the character, Leticia Wright, is described in an interview with Annabel Nugent (2021) as being Guyana-born and of Christian faith.) Of late, actor's heritages are now being more closely considered in casting, with audiences increasingly attentive and sensitive towards issues of erasure and representation. With this development, interrogation and scrutinous debate often occur surrounding whether it is appropriate for actors to depict heritages, identities and religions which differ from their own (Yossman, 2022). A recent example concerning religion involves the non-Jewish, British

actress Helen Mirren depicting former Israeli Prime Minister, Golda Meir, in Guy Nattiv's biopic *Golda* (2021). Critics, led by fellow British actress Maureen Lipman, accuse Mirren of "Jewface"; a term to describe actors of non-Jewish descent playing Jewish characters, particularly where the "Jewishness" of the characters is integral to the foundations of the character, as opposed to incidental (Yossman, 2022). For the purposes of this study, however, the heritage/ (cultural) identities of the actors depicting characters is not the focus; it is, rather, the nature and manner of the character that is being explored.

Recurring themes in the stories of Muslim female characters involve conflict, usually with an aspect of their environment. Both Yasmin in *Yasmin* and Nasima in *Britz* are at odds with societal responses to anti-terrorism laws as a direct response to the 11th September 2001 attacks. The level of their perception of injustice begins in different places; Yasmin is relatively carefree at the beginning of her narrative journey. However this is largely due to the story commencing prior to the aforementioned terrorist attacks, whereas in Nasima's case, the story begins after the attacks have already taken place. For Mona in *Honour,* the conflict is the threat of her family, who want to kill her for bringing shame upon them. Although this conflict is the character's family and not wider society, both conflicts are rooted in Islam playing the catalyst of the conflict. One could go further and suggest that it is the character's religion that is the direct cause of their conflict. Were they not Muslim, their story conflict would not exist. It is notable too, that both of these forms of conflict are not just a problem for the characters facing them, but are perceived to be wider societal problems resulting from Islam within the cultural imagination. Honour killings are a known problem both within and towards the West (Heydari et al., 2021), as is Islamic terrorism. They are issues that go beyond being problems specifically and solely affecting Muslim characters themselves. Furthermore, the problems the characters face are not specific to being a Muslim woman in Britain. This is an element I explore both in the practice aspect of this thesis (screenplay), and in the 'Screenplay: Process' section of Chapter 2, where I discuss the of writing the script – including the decision-making and crafting behind narrative choices.

In addition to recurring themes of conflict with environment, there are other common factors Muslim female characters tend to share – they are often introduced as unhappy or joyless[30], and divided or pained, usually as a result of an environmental conflict. Their identities and the position in which they find themselves in society do not or cannot co-exist without

[30] My case study analysis measures how much the characters smile in the first five minutes of being introduced, to gauge our intended first impression reading of their happiness/ state of joy.

hiding parts of themselves from parts of the outside world (*Yasmin*, *Britz*, and *Honour*). Their romantic life is often stifled or halted, and the reason can be directly linked to their Muslim religion (*Yasmin*, *Britz*, and *Honour*). Despite stifled and halted romantic lives featuring as part of their narrative arcs, Mary (*After Love*) and Aisha (*My Brother the Devil*) do not apply here, as theirs are caused by widowhood and gang involvement respectively, neither which are directly linked to being Muslim. The characters often provide care (*Britz* and *My Brother the Devil*), and are usually shown at some point to be protected from worldly threat by a male character that is not depicted as conservatively Muslim, if they are Muslim at all (*Britz*, *My Brother the Devil* and *Honour*).

3.2.2 The Black woman on screen

The question of locating the seemingly sparce representation of the Black Muslim woman in British cinema could lie in the historical representation of the Black woman on screen, and "reductive colonial tropes" (Jaganathan, 2018) which in turn, create monolithic representations. Scholarship discussed here also derives from the United States, in the context of slavery and colonialism, as opposed to solely looking to the work of seminal UK historians, as I have found the US historiographic school useful in disseminating issues of womanhood, feminism and sexuality with regards to the Black woman specifically. Historically, curated images of the Black woman on screen often presented as being "controlled by three main stereotypes – the mammy, the jezebel, and the sapphire[31]" (Walley-Jean, 2009, pp.69-70). The influence of slavery and colonialism shaped hegemonic ideologies that provided a template view of the Black woman, that has had lasting residual cultural effects, both in media representation and beyond (Ukadike, 1994, pp.102-103). A prominent and pervasive colonial ideology concerned Black sexuality. Felly Nkweto Simmons posits that, "Black sexuality has historically been defined by white racism to justify its perception of the inferiority of Black people" (1988, pp.14). This justification, she continues:

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[31] 'Sapphire' here can be understood as the stereotype popularised "during the 1940s and 1950s… sassy, overly assertive, and argumentative nature, a defining feature of the Sapphire is the control and emasculation of Black men… [and a] verbally and physically aggressive nature" (Jerald, 2017, pp.610-611). The term also shares a name with the (British) Basil Dearden film, in which a white-passing Black woman is murdered in Hampstead Heath, London (*Sapphire*, 1952).

> was used to the economic advantage of white slavers, particularly after the banning of direct importation of enslaved Africans, when the reproduction of an enslaved workforce had to be ensured. The image of the Black woman as breeder played a crucial role in the reproduction of the workforce. (Simmons, 1988, pp.14)

This perception allowed for other sexual (mis)treatment, as noted by Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe. "By labelling Black women as sexually promiscuous in this way, white men were thus exonerated for their sexual excesses under slavery" (2018, p.193).

In a British context, after the Second World War when there was a shortage of labour to rebuild the nation, people from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia were encouraged to migrate for work (Young, 1986). The ignorance and fear surrounding the settlement numbers of Black people of African descent was, by that time, embedded in the collective British psyche. These settlements of visibly 'different' strangers precipitated a number of studies in the popular press as to the nature of the 'problem' being imported (Young, pp.89).

From the late 1940s until the mid 1960s, much sociological material was written concerning monitoring and controlling sexual relations between white and non-white populations (largely Black men and white women), with interracial sexual relationships being an issue of controversy, with eugenicist sentiment gathering momentum due to moral panic surrounding the perceived dangers interracial sex posed to the white race. In terms of cinema specifically, this time period established the production and reproduction of "generally xenophobic and imperialist" narratives, making "use of racial issues […] to promote a set of ideas which assume a consistent and uniform set of social expectations and practices in relation to beliefs about racial and sexual difference" (Young, 1997, pp.90).

Ideas of sexual threat were cultivated in the cultural imagination, 'othering' non-white people generally, but with a particular focus on Black men as the 'Black Buck'; "oversexed and savage, violent and frenzied" (Bogle, 1997, p.21). This in turn, led to projected assumptions and beliefs surrounding Black women. One such identity is that of the 'tragic mulatto', described by Donald Bogle as "a figure of the black pantheon… that proved itself a moviemaker's darling" (Bogle, p17) – a reference to its prevalence in cinema. This was true during Britain's post-Second World War period (WW2 to the mid-60s), with the film *Sapphire* (Directed by Basil Dearden,1959), voted the 'Best British Film' of the year by the British Film Academy (Hill, 1985). The film, a detective mystery set in London, begins with the discovery of a murdered student, who despite being Black, has been 'passing' as white (Scovell, 2019).

Her demise, discovered to be at the hands of her fiancé's sister, fits typically with the tragic mulatto trope: Sapphire had flaunted her happiness and pregnancy, and paid with her life.

An additional ideological trope, that could be construed as related to assertions about Black men, is the notion that Black women are "not only emotionally callous but physically invulnerable (Wallace, 1979, p.138 in Simmonds, 1988, p.10)," which could offer a reason for how they are understood, represented and treated – when assigned this 'invulnerability' the "ruthless exploitation" of Black women's sexuality becomes more palatable (Simmonds, p.14). J. Celeste Walley-Jean furthers this, proposing that:

> These images allowed for the belief that African American women could not be raped because they always "wanted it" and subsequently permitted the perpetrators of these crimes against African American women to escape legal or social sanctions. This image has persisted and evolved into the modern-day jezebel image, also identified as "hoochies," "freaks," "hood- rats," or "chickenheads," which are ever-present in hip-hop music videos projected almost constantly on television stations. (Walley-Jean, 2009, p.70)

These extensions of the 'jezebel' image extended across decades, finding a home in all genres – quite distinctly and consistently identifiable in the "Blaxploitation" cinema of the 70s and 80s, created largely by Black filmmakers. Representations within the films were discussed by "prominent African American actors, directors, screenwriters and intellectuals" at the time, debating whether such films represented important recognition of Black artists, or whether such films merely offered up Black people as (new) stereotypes – "studs, pimps, prostitutes and pushes" (Lawrence, 2016, p.4). In more recent times, the colonial hangover of these assertions still linger, although they have evolved. It could be said that this invulnerability has manifested into a certain strength, although it is the kind that allows no leeway for emotional depth: after all, vulnerability evokes empathy and appeals to an understanding of a subject's humanity. Therefore the strength as represented in the monolithic Black woman is not necessarily a celebration of resilience, but acts as a barrier to allowing the invocation of empathy. As Norma Manatu observes;

> Black women are 'superwomen' near fictive characters who do the impossible; […] Black women do not fall in love. For example, when presented as professionals, these women are aggressive and Amazonian, real

> and unreal all at once (St.Jean & Fagin, 1998). When presented as involved in male-female relationships, Black women have sex; they do not make love. They are shown as women who do not value romance and so are coded as far from being romantic figures (Iverem, 1997); their approach to men, instead, is often presented as crass. (2009, p.11)

All of these ideas in turn, feed into the creation of the 'angry Black woman' image, which Walley- Jean argues "arises from [a] foundation of negative images and the position of subordination of African American women that seeks to restrain their expression of anger by negatively labelling it." This labelling appears to be utilised frequently as a silencing tool, often within political contexts. The British Black Panthers, who included Black and South Asian women, were essentially invisible in British mass media (BBC Sounds, 2019), but as Gilroy points out in *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (2013), the UK red top press did not miss the opportunity to lash out at them at the time of the Brixton and Handsworth 'riots' (Gilroy, 2013, pp.241-245). In the reporting of figures such as Dolly Kiffin, a community activist on the Broadwater Farm Estate, the press at the time appeared to evoke and intersect different existing tropes of Black women. Kiffin was labelled 'Mama Queen', a "matriarchal figure to scores of jobless youths" whose "word is law – the only law" (Gilroy, p.242). This naming evokes the 'mammy' figure (the Black woman as carer), coinciding it with a sapphire-esque, overly assertive, dangerous Black woman (Jerald, 2017, pp.610-611).

3.2.3 Why so few Black Muslim women and under what terms?

Why then, might there be so few Black Muslim women in British cinema? I offer that the cultural imagination of the Black woman does not align with the cultural imagination of the Muslim woman. The Black woman, often presented as an evolution of the sapphire or the jezebel – aggressive and larger than life, is unreconcilable with the assumed characteristics of the Muslim woman; either fairly docile, or when she is not docile, she is a covert and silent threat.

My script – and my decolonial practice of deconstruction takes off from here; the colonial and neo-colonial structures that lead to the erasure and suppression, in the British imaginary, of the Black Muslim woman (who is, in reality, present and real in the British public sphere). In

addressing this erasure, or blind spot, it is useful to take into consideration this potential irreconcilability of the image of the Muslim woman with that of the Black woman, because in terms of the script, it feeds into the deconstructing of the narrative ideologies which frequently resurface in the telling of stories concerning Muslim identities – the origin of narrative conflict, for example, and also character need and motivation.

Using my analysis of selected but representative representations, my script inhabits this blind spot – this hole created by an ideological force-field, and develops it into an articulation of Black Muslim identity as a complex, layered process of negotiation – to evoke Stuart Hall here, as identities that are *never fixed* (Hall, 1997, pp.123-133).

SHEDDING

OR

EXAMINING THE ONTOLOGICAL DESTABILIZING OF POSITIONALITY

Naida Redgrave
Ph.D Thesis Script
March 2022

FADE IN:

1. **EXT. HOUSE - AUTUMN AFTERNOON** 1.

A creamy sky frames a mock-Tudor house. The anemic-green lawn is neat but not overly preened. A skinny Juneberry tree clings onto amber tufts of gently rustling leaves. The car in front of the garage - a mid-size SUV - faces outwards, behind a slip of pavement that meets the driveway. We could be anywhere in present-day suburban England.

SCREEN SPLITS:

UNCONSCIOUS LENS

Things remain quiet a little longer, until RAYA (12) approaches the house from the pavement on the right, pausing short of being visible from the upstairs windows of the house. She quickly lifts the hijab draped around her neck and places it over her head. Fumbling in her bag for a moment, she reaches for a key.

INTERROGATED LENS

The tree’s leaves shake more forcefully: the rustle and hiss builds in the wind.

RAYA (V.O)
It happened in autumn. I think there were storms. I remember the wind, hearing it wheeze and claw against the windows like it was this thing trying to find a way in. And then one day it did - it got in through the gaps in our house and it blew and blew and shook us all around until we knocked into each other.

2. EXT/INT. HOUSE/BEDROOM-DAY
UNCONSCIOUS LENS

Raya opens the front door. As she walks through, AFRICAN DRUM MUSIC wafts through the house. She runs up the stairs, along a short corridor and into a bedroom. She slams the door behind her, before PUNK ROCK drowns out the other music.

2. INT. BEDROOM - DAY
INTERROGATED LENS

[SILENT SCENE]
Raya slides into the bottom bunk bed and snaps chunky wireless headphones over her ears. Lying back into the pillows, she mouths along to the music.

3. INT. CORRIDOR/KITCHEN - DAY

TITLE OVER: PART ONE

Two BLACK GIRLS skitter along a hallway, their Afro puffs tied in matching styles. They're dressed in unbranded T-shirts and jeans that are well-worn but with life in them yet - like the scuffed hallway wallpaper fixed with tippex.

The girls, Raya and NASRA (8) approach the door ahead with caution. The MUSIC LOUDENS and a WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S) hums along. Raya gently pushes the door ajar. We hear the Woman's voice (O.S) more clearly now. Raya watches for a moment. Nasra shoves into Raya for a closer look, elbowing until she negotiates her position in front. They watch quietly, peering through the slit in the door, as still as possible (which for Nasra, isn't very possible at all).

Beyond the door the Woman, SAIMA, wears glasses and a *kanga* wrapped into a knot at the back of her head, which matches the one wrapped around her waist.

She's 42, but she could be older or younger, it's hard to tell. SAIMA half-hums, half-sings along to the music coming through the counter-top stereo. She has an obvious accent - it's gentle, as if her words in English are always cradled by her mother tongue. Steam rises from the pan in front of her. Other pots BUBBLE AND SPIT on the cooker.

Raya taps Nasra on the shoulder and points into the kitchen: a spread of cupcakes, covered in cling film.

Saima takes a pan off the cooker and over to the sink, pouring the contents - rice - into a colander. Her glasses steam up.

SAIMA
Oof! Jamani!

The PHONE RINGS. Saima puts down the pan, pulling her glasses off and lifting the flap of her kanga up from her leg. She rubs the material over the lenses and turns her attention towards the RINGING PHONE. Raya and Nasra duck out of view. Saima leaves the kitchen out of the other door.

With her gone, Raya and Nasra peer back into the room. When the coast is definitely clear Raya nods - they scurry in - Raya scrambles to remove the cling film - Nasra swipes four cupcakes. They then run off: mission complete.

4. INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Nasra and Raya shove cupcakes into their mouths, grinning in victory. They're sat directly under the HANGING LIGHT - it's daytime but the sky's now a dark ash grey.

There's a QUIET TAPPING on the window. The ceiling light moves very slightly.

The lino floor of the bathroom blends into the walls, which blend into the grey beyond the windows: a sea of beige. Under the light, the glistening icing on the cupcakes are a spark amongst the surroundings.

SAIMA (O.S.)
Raya!

RAYA
Quick, finish it!

The door handle rattles. Raya gulps and dusts her mouth.

SAIMA (O.S.)
Are you in there? Unlock the door.

RAYA
Coming!

Raya opens the door, smiling awkwardly - her mouth is closed as she runs her tongue over her teeth.

RAYA
Mmhmm?

SAIMA
Where are the cakes?

RAYA
What cakes?

SAIMA
What cakes. For tomorrow. From the kitchen!

Nasra chews, cheeks puffed out, crumbs and icing spread across her face. Saima looks up at the light and turns it off.

SAIMA
Raya, why are you letting your sister eat in the toilet? *Astaghfur'Allah*. You're trying to call wa shaytani into the house? Eating in the toilet? Haya, come! Out, out.

Saima ushers them through the door. Raya glares at Nasra who is sheepishly still chewing. The girls have long walked off when Saima continues:

SAIMA
Don't they give you school work to do in the holidays? Stealing food as if you're starved! *Wallahi* this country. Children back home aren't like this. Eating in the toilet. The *toilet*!

5. INT. KITCHEN - DAY

MUSIC plays in the background - a similar style to before. A MOBILE PHONE VIBRATES on the side. Saima lifts it, looks at the screen long enough to decide not to answer, then puts it down. She flips the counter-top stereo dial to 'radio'.

RADIO (O.S)
Storms set to head towards the South East, with gale force winds expected throughout the night and into the morning.[...]

Saima walks over to the cupcakes, replaces the cling film, then puts the platter out of reach on top of the fridge.

The mobile phone vibrates again. The screen reads ‘WADA’ - Saima cancels the call but stares at the phone, expectant and agitated. She waits...

Eventually, she picks up the phone and hovers her thumb over the screen. And hovers.

A bubbling saucepan OVERFLOWS, spilling off the cooker and onto the countertop. Saima drops the phone elsewhere on the counter.

6. INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Saima, Raya and Nasra sit around the circular table. There’s a fourth empty chair. Raya and Nasra eat with spoons - Saima eats with her right hand.

NASRA
What does a shaytani look like?

RAYA
Red with horns. And his eyes are like, fiery orange, and he’s got these great big teeth and massive claws that rip the faces off little girls. Especially eight-year-old girls.

SAIMA
Okay Raya, *basi*, why do you always have to take it too far?

NASRA
You’re a little girl too.

RAYA
No, I’m basically a teenager.

SAIMA
You’re not a teenager yet.

RAYA
That’s what ‘basically’ means.

NASRA
So they live in the bathroom?

SAIMA
No darling, they don’t live in the bathroom... They’re everywhere.

NASRA
Everywhere?

SAIMA
Well, only when you call them. That’s why we don’t eat in the bathroom or in the toilet.

NASRA
So we called it by eating in the bathroom?

SAIMA
Just don’t eat in the bathroom.

NASRA
Does he really have claws?

SAIMA
No darling, your sister’s just making silly things up.

He could look like anything he wants. He could look like a person.

RAYA
So how exactly are you supposed to know if a person’s a person then, and not a shaytani?

SAIMA
Well, obviously... You would just know.

NASRA
How?

SAIMA
Girls, can we change the subject now please?

RAYA
Apparently there’s a guy who’s started working at a shop in town, and he’s a right perv. Like a pedo, perv.

SAIMA
Raya please, she’s eight! [...] Which shop?

7. EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

The windows glow a soft orange from inside the house. Wind bristles through the Juneberry tree, gently at first, then it picks up speed until leaves start to fall. The garage security light flicks on. The fallen leaves stir then form twirling columns that collide and rise into the sky.

8. INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's dim but not pitch black - light enough to make out the various framed verses from the Qur'an on the walls in-between drawings and doodles and magazine clippings. One wall is more cutesy: animals, hearts, butterflies. The other has band photos and fashion magazine spreads. Nasra and Raya are on their respective bunks (Raya bottom, Nasra top), apparently sleeping, until:

NASRA
Ry?

RAYA
Go to sleep.

NASRA
At school some girls have this secret club, and you can only join if you know things.

RAYA
What things?

NASRA
Grown-up things.

RAYA
Why do you care? You don't want to be in their stupid club.

NASRA
You don't get what it's like. Everyone just treats me like I'm a stupid baby.

RAYA
Well, you're not a baby and you're not stupid - you're super smart.

Way smarter than most kids your age.

NASRA
Do you really think that?

RAYA
Definitely. I wouldn't say it if I didn't mean it. Do you want to come down?

Nasra crawls down to Raya's bunk and gets under the covers. Raya tucks her in.

RAYA
What things do you think they're talking about?

9. INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Saima paces the kitchen, phone to her ear. Her voice is panicked and curt.

SAIMA
Can you get her to call me, it's urgent. [...] Just whenever.[...] As soon as possible.

10. INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

The girls sleep, a tangled pile of pillows and limbs. Nasra wakes.

NASRA
Ry? Ry!

RAYA
I'm asleep.

NASRA
I need the toilet.

RAYA
So go to the toilet.

NASRA
Can you come with me?

RAYA
Do you feel ill?

NASRA
No, I just want you to come with me.

RAYA
What? Since when do you need me to go with you?

NASRA
Raya, please? I really need to go.

Raya sighs and flings the duvet off them both. Nasra hops off the bed.

RAYA
I'm leaving if you poo.

11. INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

A hanging *tasbih* PATTERS at the window. Raya and Nasra tip-toe down the hall.

12. KICTHEN - NIGHT

Saima stares into the distance at nothing, tapping out her fingers on the counter with one hand, holding her phone to her ear with the other. Until:

SAIMA
Hello, yes, I'm looking for my sister.

13. INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Raya leans on the sink and looks up at the mirror. She unties her hair and combs it out with her fingers until it forms a soft frame around her head. Nasra flushes the toilet.

RAYA
How do I look?

NASRA
Messy. You should let mum plait it.

RAYA
Whatever.

NASRA
Do you think (mouths) *shaytani*, is here now?

RAYA
What?

NASRA
You know (mouths more exaggeratedly) *SHAYTANI.*

RAYA
Oh, are you still on about that? No, he's not here. Why, do you want me to call him?

NASRA
No!

RAYA
I can just whistle in the bathroom, that calls him too.

Raya starts to whistle. Nasra throws the toilet roll at her.

NASRA
Raya, no! Stop it!

RAYA
It's not real Nasra. You just have to go along with it for Mum.

NASRA
Why would Mum think it, if it isn't real?

Raya shrugs and throws the toilet roll back at her sister. She misses and knocks a row of bottles from a shelf.

RAYA
Ooooh (sing-song voice) he's here. (deep, gruff voice) It's the shaytani.

Nasra pelts out of the room.

14.INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

The girls are back in their own bunks. Raya's curled asleep in her duvet, Nasra's delicately arranging soft toys along the edges of her bed, forming a border around the mattress. A DEEP, GUTTERAL WAILING disturbs her. Nasra scrambles under her bedding until the sound ends, then she lifts the duvet a fraction, just enough to peer out and see Raya get out of bed.

NASRA
What was that?

RAYA
Stay here. I'll be back in a minute.

NASRA
Don't leave me on my own!

RAYA
It's fine, just go back to sleep.

Nasra uncovers herself and watches her sister leave. The sound of MUFFLED CRYING seeps though the walls. She sits up and swivels towards the ladder to leave the bed. The crying stops. She hesitates, then turns her attention back to the soft toys that have been knocked out of place.

15. EXT. PARK - DAY

Raya, wearing a headwrap, walks slowly, forcefully kicking piles of dry leaves in her path. Nasra bounces around her, scooping the leaves into her arms and flinging them up in the air.

NASRA
What's the house going to be like?

RAYA
I don’t know.

NASRA
But you’ve been there before.

RAYA
So have you.

NASRA
But you’re older. I don’t remember.

RAYA
I don’t remember either.

NASRA
Is it far from here?

RAYA
Quite far.

NASRA
How far? Like here to the airport?
Or further than that?

RAYA
I don’t know.

NASRA
Well how long will it take?

RAYA
I *don’t* know.

NASRA
Is it going to be more than an
hour?

RAYA
Nasra will you shut up for one second! Why are you so annoying?

NASRA
I don't know.

16. INT. CAR - DAY

Saima stares at the traffic jam ahead. Raya's in the front, head turned out of the passenger window. Saima tucks some stray hair back under her hijab, then smooths the material down. Nasra observes her closely in the rear view mirror, transfixed.

Saima's eyes start to water - she brushes the tears away with the back of her hand and clears her throat. Raya glances across at her.

RAYA
Stupid traffic.

SAIMA
Driving like donkeys.

NASRA
Your hijab looks pretty, Mummy.

SAIMA
Thank you, darling.

17. INT. WADA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Qu'ran verses play from a stereo. Saima sits motionless beside a gurney - ontop rests a body covered in a white sheet. She's being comforted by a HIJABI WOMAN.

Raya and Nasra watch from across the room. ZUWEINA (70s) walks over to the girls.

ZUWEINA
Watoto, you shouldn't be here to see this.

RAYA
We can't actually see her.

ZUWEINA
Why don't you go and play upstairs?

NASRA
There's no toys.

ZUWEINA
You know, when somebody is taken, it's not good for children to be around. Go on Raya, take your little sister upstairs.

18. INT. WADA's HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Raya leans over the bannister, watching A GROUP OF FOUR WOMEN speak in hushed, overlapping voices below.

NASRA
Shall we play hide and seek?

RAYA
No.

NASRA
Well, what do you want to play?

RAYA
I don't want to play anything.

NASRA
But the lady told us to go and play.

RAYA
She’s not a lady, she’s Mum’s Aunty.

Raya walks off, into a room, closing the door behind her. Nasra looks over into the open bathroom.

19. INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Saima stands over the cooker, stirring the contents of a boiling pot. Nasra watches.

NASRA
What are you making?

SAIMA
Mchuzi.

NASRA
What’s in it?

SAIMA
It’s just chicken.

NASRA
Can you teach me how to make it?

SAIMA
Why don’t you see what your sister’s doing?

NASRA
She told me to leave her alone.

SAIMA
Raya! Come down here and play with your sister.

Raya appears, coat on and bag slung over her shoulder.

RAYA
Can I go out?

SAIMA
Can you take your sister?

RAYA
Do I have to?

SAIMA
Raya, please.

RAYA
I’m going to do homework and she’ll get in the way.

SAIMA
What homework?

RAYA
I won’t be able to concentrate. You know how annoying she gets.

SAIMA
Stop it. Take her, she’ll sit quietly. (to NASRA) You’ll sit quietly.

NASRA
I’ll sit quietly.

RAYA
No! You two always gang up on me - why can't you both just leave me alone!

Raya storms out of the room.

SAIMA
(calls out) Well where are you going?

The front door slams. Saima shuts her eyes, takes a deep breath in and opens them, returning to stirring more vigourously. Nasra shuts her eyes, tightly, breathing in emphatically before opening them and shaking her head wistfully (for her Mum's benefit).

20. INT. HOUSE - EVENING

Nasra sits at the bottom of the stairs, plaiting a bracelet. The LETTERBOX in the front door wafts gently.

A key turns in the lock and Raya walks in. Saima attempts to usher Nasra upstairs - but she just sits back down a few steps up.

SAIMA
Where have you been, it's late.

RAYA
Out.

SAIMA
What do you mean, 'out'?

RAYA
I mean, I wasn't *in*, I was *out*.

SAIMA
You know it’s not easy at the moment, with your Aunty-

Raya heads for the stairs, shoving past Nasra.

RAYA
You never talked to her anyway.

SAIMA
This attitude. I am sick up to here-

A door SLAMS. Saima turns to Nasra, fixing to speak but not having the words.

NASRA
What’s wrong with her?

SAMIA
I don’t know what’s got into her, *wallahi*.

Saima kisses her on top of the head then thunders up the stairs towards the girls’ bedroom.

21. INT. ZAHRA’S HOUSE, BEDROOM - DAY

Nasra sits on the carpet floor with ZAHRA (9), who’s wearing a hijab with a long jersey top and loose trousers. They’re surrounded by an afternoon’s worth of toys.

NASRA
Raya never wants to play anymore.

ZAHRA
So? You can play with me.

NASRA
I know, but I think something's wrong with her.

ZAHRA
How do you mean?

NASRA
Do you know what shaytanis are?

ZAHRA
Yeah, of course.

NASRA
I think she did something.

ZAHRA
What do you mean?

NASRA
I think she called one and it's doing something to her.

ZAHRA
Okay - wait - rewind. So *she* told you she called one? Or *you think* she called one? Because she might just be trying to scare you.

NASRA
No, it's not that. She didn't tell me, I saw it.

ZAHRA
You *saw* a shaytani?

NASRA
No, I didn't see anything. Well, I don't know what I saw. She's just being weird.

ZAHRA
Big sisters are weird. Farida's horrible. She shouts all the time.

NASRA
It's not just that. She called a shaytani into our bathroom and now I think it's in her, or it's doing something to her.

ZAHRA
Was it night-time?

NASRA
Yes.

ZAHRA
So did she cut her nails in there?

NASRA
No, she just whistled.

ZAHRA
She whistled! U-oh.

NASRA
Is that worse?

ZAHRA
Probably. Well, if it worked, you'd know, because they make scary stuff happen.

NASRA
Like what?

ZAHRA
I saw a film once, and this shaytani got inside this girl, and when she got angry all this blood poured out of her nose and mouth, and it sprayed everywhere. It was gross.

Zahra leaps up and pulls a notebook and pencil off a side table. She places it in front of Nasra.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)
You need to write down everything she does in here.

NASRA
What for?

ZAHRA
For evidence.

NASRA
And then what?

ZAHRA
That’s what they did in the film.

NASRA
What happened to the girl in the end?

ZAHRA
I don’t know. Mum made me go to bed before it finished.

22. EXT. STREET - DAY

Raya walks silently, slightly ahead and at a steady pace, with her hands in her pockets. Nasra scurries to keep up, all the while eyeing Raya suspiciously. After a while:

RAYA
Okay, what are you looking at me like that for?

NASRA
I'm not looking at you.

Raya walks off, shaking her head. Nasra slows right down.

NASRA CONT'D (CONT'D)
(whispers, far less subtly than she thinks) I know you're there.

RAYA
Well I'm not exactly hiding, am I? Keep up, you weirdo.

23. INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - EVENING

The girls are in their respective bunks, not yet sleeping. Nasra's arranging her soft toys along the edges of the bed, Raya's sat up, scrolling on her phone.

NASRA
Where did you go the other day?

RAYA
Out.

NASRA
Where?

RAYA
Just out.

NASRA
Mum doesn’t let you have your phone after seven o’ clock.

RAYA
Mum doesn’t need to know. She’s busy with Aunty stuff.

NASRA
Where did she get taken?

RAYA
Aunty? You mean like the morgue? Or after the funeral?

NASRA
No, before that, she got taken. So that’s why she died.

RAYA
No, we just didn’t see her for ages because Mum and her stopped speaking. She wasn’t taken anywhere.

NASRA
What did she do to mum?

RAYA
Why do you automatically think it was her fault?

NASRA
It wouldn’t be Mum’s fault.

RAYA
Things seem simple until you get a bit older.

You'll realise it's not simple.
People change and other people
don't accept them.

NASRA
Was she older or younger than mum?

RAYA
Older.

NASRA
Oh.
(beat)
Do you feel warm? Or cold?

RAYA
I think the temperature in here's
fine.

NASRA
But if you had to choose, would you
say you're warm... or cold... or
just right?

RAYA
Maybe a bit warm.

Nasra pulls the notebook from Zahra out from under her pillow and scribbles hurriedly with a pencil.

NASRA
And does anything feel different
today, that you noticed?

Raya stands, and Nasra quickly shuts the notebook and covers it with a teddy.

RAYA
What's that?

NASRA
Homework.

24. INT. BATHROOM/HALLWAY - EVENING

Through a slit where the door's ajar, Raya's reaching into a cupboard. She walks out of sight. We hear soft plastic crinkle. The toilet flushes. The tap runs. Then footsteps.

25. INT. HALLWAY - EVENING

Raya opens the door. Nasra's standing, breath held, back pressed against the wall.

RAYA
What are you doing?

NASRA
Nothing. I need the toilet.

Nasra waits until Raya's stomped off - once the coast is clear she slips into the bathroom.

26. INT. BATHROOM - EVENING

Nasra inspects the surroundings: sink - nothing, toilet - nothing. She looks in the bin and stops - her EYES WIDEN.

27. INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - EVENING

Nasra hurries up the bunkbed ladder and pulls the notebook from under her pillow. She writes: Blood on wipe in the bin.

28. INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Saima, Raya and Nasra sit around the table with breakfast. Nasra watches Raya closely, who is stuffing food into her mouth.

SAIMA
I thought we could do something together tonight. Maybe we could watch something?

RAYA
I'm going out.

SAIMA
No Raya, *jamani*, stay at home today. It's not good for you to be out all over the place.

RAYA
I'll be fine to go out.

SAIMA
It's not about 'fine', it's about you *should* be at home. You need to rest when you can.

RAYA
You already said it was okay to go to Muna's. You can't just change your mind at the last minute. I can't let her down now, we have a school project.

SAIMA
Fine. Only for homework.

RAYA
Yep, don't worry, I'll make sure *not* to have any fun. But if you're worried about me getting rest, my mattress is really pokey and lumpy and it has a weird slope in it, so can I get a new one?

SAIMA
You know, when I was your age we didn't have mattresses like you're used to. I slept on a thin mat on the floor and I never complained.

Raya rolls her eyes. Nasra resumes watching Raya closely.

29. EXT. PARK - EVENING

Raya - in a headwrap - sits on a swing next to MUNA (Black, 11). TWO OTHER GIRLS, ASHURA (Mixed-race, in a hijab, 12) and BELINDA (White, 11) lean against the swing's frame.

MUNA
What's it like? Was she blue like on TV?

RAYA
No. She looked really white, like she had talcum powder on.

ASHURA
Did she feel cold to touch?

BELINDA
Why would she touch her?

ASHURA
I dunno, to see what her skin felt like.

BELINDA
Your first reaction to seeing your dead Aunt would be to see what her skin felt like? Could you *actually be any* creepier.

ASHURA
Well I'm sorry, but if my Aunty died, I'd want to touch her and hug her and basically just get in the ground with her for a bit. Because it'd be the last time I'd see her.

BELINDA
Okay, apparently you can get creepier.

MUNA
Did your Mum say what happened? Like, how she died?

RAYA
No. I didn't ask.

MUNA
How come?

Raya shrugs. A GROUP OF TEENS enter the park and gather round a bench. One hands out cans of beer. They race each other to down them, shouting and egging each other on. Raya looks up at the group: she meets eyes with a GIRL with thick bangs and a bob, bleached white, wearing heavy black eyeliner and dark purple lipstick.

Raya and the Girl hold eyes as she chugs her drink, struggling through without stopping until she finishes. The Girl smiles at Raya then throws the can on the ground.

BELINDA
Oi - earth to Ry - are you gonna look then?

RAYA
Look at what?

BELINDA
I was saying, there'll be a record. A death certificate. It'll say on there.

RAYA
Oh. Yeah, I might try.

ASHURA
Maybe there are public records? I could have a look.

The Group of Teens start setting fire to bits of paper and waving them around. One grabs a CAN OF DEODORANT.

ASHURA (CONT'D)
We should go.

MUNA
Before these idiots burn the park down.

30. INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Nasra shows Zahra her notebook - they go through a long list of various observations.

ZAHRA
So there's blood - like the girl in the film!

NASRA
And she didn't say anything to Mum. She's hiding it.

ZAHRA
Did you see her bleeding? Was it from her nose? Her mouth?

NASRA
I didn't see it happening.

ZAHRA
This is not good. Not good at all.

NASRA
I know.

ZAHRA
Are you going to tell your Mum?

NASRA
But if Raya's a shaytani, Mum won't want her in the house.

ZAHRA
Can you ask your Mum without telling her about Raya?

NASRA
No. No-one tells me anything. I've got to figure it out myself.

ZAHRA
Okay, if there's a shaytani in her, we need to get it out of her.

NASRA
How?

ZAHRA
We're going to need to watch to the end of the film.

31. INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Saima walks up the stairs, balancing a kanga-tied bundle of laundry on her head as Raya is leaving the bedroom.

SAIMA
I forgot to ask last night - how's Muna?

RAYA
Fine.

SAIMA
Did you get the project done?

RAYA
Yeah.

SAIMA
Nasra's staying with Zahra tonight.

Saima makes her way to her room. Raya stops and looks back to her mum - she lingers, hesitates to say something, then carries on to the stairs.

32. INT. ZAHRA'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - EVENING

Zahra and Nasra swipe through an iPAD. They go to the downloads and find the film.

ZAHRA
Here, it's this one.

Zahra clicks on it - a parental lock comes up.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)
Oh no.

NASRA
I know my Mum's password?

ZAHRA
It won't be the same will it?

NASRA
We could try it, just in case?

Nasra types a password in - the iPad rejects it.

NASRA (CONT'D)
What now?

33. INT. ZAHRA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

ZAHRA's MUM, SHEMSA (48) is watching her phone. The girls walk in with the iPad.

ZAHRA
Mum... there's this maths app that looks really good that we want to try. Can we get it?

SHEMSA
Okay, do what you like.

ZAHRA
I just need you to do the pin number.

SHEMSA
Bring it.

Zahra hands over the iPad - the girls stand each side of Shemsa. She hits the first digit: 8. The girls watch closely. She hits the next: 2. The next: 6. Their EYES WIDEN. Shemsa pauses and looks towards Zahra. The girls' faces fall. Shemsa looks up at the ceiling... Finally, she hits the last number: 4. Zahra snatches the iPad and the girls scoot off.

ZAHRA
Thanks Mum!

SHEMSA
Not so fast around the house, you'll break something!

34. INT. ZAHRA'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - NIGHT

Under a bedsheet den, Nasra and Zahra lie on their fronts, legs swinging in the air, focused on the screen.

They jump suddenly; Nasra ducks behind her hands. Zahra peels Nasra's hands from her face.

NASRA
It's horrible.

ZAHRA
You have to watch! Otherwise we won't know what to do.

NASRA
She’s just killing everyone!

ZAHRA
Yeah, but that man and woman,
remember? They’re going to come and
find her and do the thing.

SHEMSA (O.S.)
Are you girls okay in there?

Zahra mutes the volume and shields the screen with her body. Shemsa pokes her head into the den.

SHEMSA
This looks nice and cosy. What are
you watching?

ZAHRA
Cartoons.

NASRA
Maths.

ZAHRA
Maths cartoons.

SHEMSA
Okay girls, don’t stay up too late.
Have you brushed your teeth?

BOTH
Yes.

The girls wait until they hear Shemsa close the door, then switch the screen back on.

35. EXT. PARK - DAY

Raya and Muna sit side-by-side on a verge in the park, plucking grass.

MUNA
How's your Mum?

RAYA
Annoying.

MUNA
Didn't her sister just die? She's probably quite sad or depressed or something.

RAYA
She wasn't even speaking to my Aunt before she died.

MUNA
Shall we go to the shop and spy on the perv?

RAYA
I don't want to spy on the perv.

MUNA
Well what do you want to do then?

RAYA
I'm sorry if my idea of fun isn't spying on a pedo.

MUNA
You know, you're really moody at the moment.

RAYA
Because I don't want to do exactly what you want me to do?

MUNA
I wasn’t going to say anything, and I’ve actually been defending you because of your Aunty and stuff, but everyone thinks you’re being a massive bitch right now.

Raya stands, brushes the grass from her clothes and picks up her bag.

MUNA (CONT'D)
Okay, look, I’m sorry. I just don’t get why you’re so angry! And you don’t say anything, you’re just quiet. Why don’t you just say if something’s wrong?

RAYA
I don’t have anything I could say to you, even if I wanted to. Which I don’t.

MUNA
What does that even mean?

Raya walks away. The Group of Teens who were drinking the other evening enter the park. The Girl with the bleached bob, SOPHIE (14) notices Raya and approaches.

SOPHIE
Don’t I know you?

RAYA
We had swimming together. Like, ages ago.

SOPHIE
Oh yeah. So what are you doing now? Are you out for a bit?

RAYA
I don’t know. No, I’m going home.

SOPHIE
Come hang with us for a bit.

Muna approaches.

MUNA
Raya, can we talk please?

SOPHIE
Ooh, are you in trouble?

RAYA
(to MUNA) I don’t want to talk right now.

SOPHIE
(to MUNA) She doesn’t want to talk right now.

MUNA
Who is this? Do you even know her?

SOPHIE
Well, who the hell are you to be asking who I am?

RAYA
Okay, shall we just back off a second.

MUNA
Thank you. (to SOPHIE) Back off, why don't you?

RAYA
No, Muna. I mean, can we just leave it?

Sophie smiles condescendingly and flaps a cutesy wave.

MUNA
Seriously? Oh, whatever Raya. Call me when your done doing whatever 'this' is.

36. EXT.PARK - DAY

Raya's sat amongst the Group of Teens next to Sophie, who pulls out a packet of cigarettes.

SOPHIE
Do you smoke?

RAYA
Not really.

SOPHIE
'Not really'. Want one or not?

RAYA
Okay.

Sophie hands her one and leans in to light it. Raya blows into it. Sophie laughs.

SOPHIE
Like this.

Sophie shows her how to inhale it. Raya copies, then coughs.

RAYA
I haven’t had one in a while.

SOPHIE
Yeah, ‘in a while’. You’re funny.

Raya hands it back and gets set to leave.

RAYA
I’ve got to go home.

SOPHIE
Come out later? We’re meeting up in the fields by the woods.

RAYA
What’s happening at the fields?

SOPHIE
(laughs) Wear warm clothes. Eight o’ clock.

37. INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

Nasra leans over the edge of the top bunk, watching Raya preen herself in the mirror.

She writes the date and time, then: “Smells of burning”. She puts the notebook under her pillow.

NASRA
Are you going out again?

RAYA
Maybe.

NASRA
Does Mum know?

RAYA
Don’t know.

NASRA
Why do you go out so much?

RAYA
Because I have a life, unlike some people.

NASRA
You don’t have to be mean, you know.

RAYA
You don’t have to be annoying, you know. You just don’t get it.

NASRA
Get what?

RAYA
The things you think are bad aren’t actually bad. Sometimes they’re good.

Raya leaves the room. Nasra calls after her:

NASRA
How can bad things be good?

38. EXT. FIELDS - EVENING

Raya approaches an opening of tall trees - the last of the daylight is sinking behind the horizon of the field ahead. She pulls her headscarf (which she has allowed to fall onto her shoulders) away from her neck and shoves it into her bag.

Several GROUPS OF TEENAGERS, all aged around fourteen to sixteen, are scattered around a small bonfire. It's rowdy; there's music playing from a small portable speaker, some are drinking cans of beer or cider. PETE (Black, 14), zig-zags Raya's way, tipsy (or at least pretending to be). He's lanky - accentuated by his rolled up chinos and slender ankles. He wears a Fisherman beanie over a close-to-shaven haircut. He's got a single, beaded, feather earring which exudes a confidence in style that his body hasn't quite caught up to.

PETE
I know you.

RAYA
Okay.

PETE
No, I do. You used to live down... oh what's that road called? Near the nursery. My Mum worked there.

RAYA
I don't think it was me.

PETE
She was friends with your Mum. And you went to the nursery - I used to go after school sometimes in Reception. You won't remember, you were like two or three or something. Your house was on the corner. What's that street?

RAYA
I've only ever lived where I live now.

Sophie runs over and leaps onto Pete, forcing him into a piggyback. They are playful and familiar - like brother and sister - but Raya misinterprets this.

SOPHIE
You made it then? I see you met Pete.

PETE
(to RAYA) What's your Mum's name? Wara? War-

RAYA
Warda?

PETE
Yes! Warda.

RAYA
That's not my Mum, it's my Aunt.

SOPHIE
How do you remember this shit from when you were two?

PETE
I was five. So it must be your cousin then? A little girl. Well, obviously not little anymore.

RAYA
I don't have any cousins.

SOPHIE
You don't have *any* cousins? At all? I've got about a hundred. Like, half cousins though. My grandad was a right slag.

PETE
Are you sure?

RAYA
Well I do, but not in this country.

SOPHIE
That you know of!

PETE
Maybe I'm getting mixed up. I'll ask my Mum.

SOPHIE
Didi knows everyone, doesn't she Pete? She knows everyone's business.

PETE
She's like wikipedia. For gossip.

A teenage girl calls out to Pete, then pulls him away.

PETE
Laters!

SOPHIE
Do you want a drink?

Raya shakes her head. Sophie shoves a can of beer into her hand anyway and pulls her towards one of the groups.

SOPHIE
Come on then. I'll introduce you to everyone.

39. INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A mobile phone balances on a soft toy on the bed. Nasra's kneeling, holding her notebook up to the phone, looking back and forth between them. Zahra's squinting ON THE SCREEN.

NASRA
Can you see it now?

ZAHRA
No.

NASRA
Can you see it now?

ZAHRA
Well, sort of, but it's the wrong way round. What if you turn it the other way?

Nasra turns the notebook upside down.

NASRA
That's just upside down *and* the wrong way round.

ZAHRA
What about turning it the other side?

NASRA
The other side is the cover!

SAIMA (O.S)
Nasra, can you bring my phone?

NASRA
I've got to go.

ZAHRA
But what's the plan?

NASRA
I've got a list.

ZAHRA
Okay, now what?

NASRA
We need the supplies.

ZAHRA
From where?

NASRA
I'm going to need your help.

40. EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Raya creeps down the side of the house, through the back gate, and around to the back door.

41. INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

She reaches the hallway to the bottom of the stairs. The living room light flicks on.

SAIMA
Where have you been?

RAYA
Wow. You, um. You scared. I was scared. Of you.

Saima approaches and inspects Raya closely.

SAIMA
Where have you been?

RAYA
S..studying.

Saima grabs Raya's arm tightly.

SAIMA
Who were you with?

RAYA
Nobody.

SAIMA
You can't keep secrets from me you know. I will find out.

RAYA
Ha! Secrets? What about your secrets?

SAIMA
La'how'Allah, this is too much now. I've had enough. You better go and wash, you stink of alcohol.

RAYA
Where did Aunty used to live?

SAIMA
You know where she lived. We were at her house-

RAYA
Before. Did she live around here?

SAIMA
That was years ago.

RAYA
She lived near a nursery school.

SAIMA
What?

RAYA
Did she live near a nursery school?

SAIMA
I don’t know. It was ten years ago.

RAYA
Did she or didn’t she?

SAIMA
Okay, yes, I think so. Why does it matter?

RAYA
Is there anything you want to tell me?

SAIMA
About what?

RAYA
About Aunty Wada!

They hold each other’s stare. Raya fights back angry tears. Saima searches to translate her daughter’s face, whilst fighting to choke down the tears rising on her own.

SAMIA
Go and clean yourself. Whatever people you’re hanging around - that ends. You’re grounded. You don’t leave the house at all.

And you’re going back to Qur’an school, you and your sister. We never should have stopped.

Raya holds a glare until she’s about to break into tears, then stomps away up the stairs. Saima looks up after her.

42. INT. KICTHEN - LATE AT NIGHT

Saima stares at an envelope, as if its held her in a trance. Nasra appears at the doorway and watches briefly, then walks over to her Mum.

NASRA
Are you okay, Mummy?

SAIMA
It’s late, darling.

Saima strokes Nasra’s face and smiles.

SAIMA
Why are you up? Are you feeling okay?

NASRA
Yeah, I’m okay.

SAIMA
I think we both need some hot chocolate, don’t you?

43. INT. SAIMA’S BERDOOM - DAY

Saima and Zuweina are sat on the bed. Saima’s folded over, head in her hands, rubbing her temples.

ZUWEINA

[In Swahili; English subtitles]
It’s only going to get more out of control. You need to do something, now.

SAIMA

[In Swahili; English subtitles]
Maybe I should try talking to her-

ZUWEINA

About what? She’s a child, doing these types of things. You don’t even know exactly what she’s doing. There’s nothing to talk about, this is too serious. You need intervention.

SAIMA

Like a psychiatrist?

ZUWEINA

They don’t know what they’re doing with our kind of problems... There is something you can do though.

SAIMA

I’m not sending her back home on her own.

ZUWEINA

No, not that. But I don’t know how you’ll feel about it.

SAIMA

Okay.

ZUWEINA

There's a man, I've heard he's helped lots of people. He does medicine and reads prayers. He's very respected back home. But you know some of these mosques here. Some of these people, they don't understand it, so he keeps a bit quiet about it. People - they'll go to an atheist doctor, but they won't go to a man of faith who will pray *and* heal them? Tell me, where is the logic? Trusting your health - your life - with someone who *doesn't even speak to God*? It's madness.

SAIMA

Okay then.

44. EXT. STREET - DAY

Saima rushes along the pavement, leaving Nasra barely able to keep up. Every now and then she stops, checking the building number.

SAIMA

Why do they bother with these numbers when they don't make any sense! Why don't they do them in a normal order? Who designed it like this, a frog?

NASRA

Where are we going?

SAIMA
To make an appointment.

NASRA
Why did I have to come?

SAIMA
I can’t leave you with your sister at the moment. She’s not right.

NASRA
What’s ‘not right’ about her?

SAIMA
Aha! Here.

Saima rings a buzzer. A MAN answers.

SAIMA (CONT'D)
(in Swahili; English subtitles)
Salamalaykum. It’s Saima. We spoke on the phone.

MAN (O.S.)
(in Swahili; English subtitles)
Your appointment isn’t today.

SAIMA
I know, I just wanted to come and discuss before-

MAN (O.S.)
I don’t discuss until the day.

SAIMA
I know, but do you think we could talk for two minutes?

The BUZZER sounds - the door latch releases.

45. EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Pete and Sophie wait outside the front door. Raya answers.

SOPHIE
Alright lightweight, how's your head?

RAYA
Fine. It doesn't really feel any different.

SOPHIE
You gonna invite us in or what? It's windy out here.

Raya looks around outside, then ushers them in.

RAYA
Quick, come upstairs. You can't be here when my Mum gets back though.

46. INT. STAIRS/ BEDROOM - DAY

They walk up the stairs and into Raya and Nasra's room. Sophie pokes around the room. She picks up a soft toy from Nasra's bed.

SOPHIE
Is this yours?

RAYA
That's my sister's bed.

PETE
It must be nice having a sister and sharing a room.

Like you've got a sleepover every night with your bestie.

SOPHIE
I keep trying to tell him that's not what it's like, but he just has this idea that it's like, this really fun thing. When it's really not.

PETE
You guys don't realise how lucky you are. Being an only child is really stressful.

RAYA
How is it stressful?

SOPHIE
Yeah, having all the attention and privacy must be *super stressful*. Ignore him, he's so emo. Anyway - Pete - tell her then!

RAYA
Tell me what?

SOPHIE
Tell her about the cousin.

PETE
Sophie! That was my news!

SOPHIE
You were taking ages.

RAYA
What are you talking about?

PETE
So I asked my Mum about Wada - your Aunt. And she definitely had a kid because she registered her at the nursery. My mum remembers the kid went there for a bit.

Raya leans back against the wall, trying to absorb the information. She paces to the bed and sits down. Every time she takes a breath to speak, she stops.

SOPHIE
Sounds like you do have a cousin then.

RAYA
I don't understand. How could I not know? Are you sure?

PETE
Mum was pretty sure. She was in a rush so I didn't have time to ask loads of stuff, but Soph was there.

SOPHIE
I was there.

PETE
And she said, didn't she?

SOPHIE
She definitely said, (mimicking Pete's mum) 'yes I remember Wada, house on the corner of South Street.

Yes she had a little girl, can't remember her name at the minute, don't forget to bring your laundry down and can you take the chicken thighs out of the freezer?'

RAYA
Do you think she could find out more?

PETE
Probably. Shouldn't you just ask your Mum about it?

RAYA
I asked her last night and she wouldn't tell me.

SOPHIE
You asked her to tell you about your cousin and she said 'no'? That's a bit harsh.

RAYA
Well, no. But, basically - she had the chance to tell me, and she didn't. I'm gonna need to figure it out myself.

PETE
Why don't you come to mine and talk to my Mum? She'll tell you whatever she knows.

The front door closes and Saima and Nasra's muffled voices can be heard below.

RAYA
Oh, shit.

Sophie opens the bedroom door and PEERS HER HEAD around for a closer look. Pete joins. Raya pulls them both back.

RAYA (CONT'D)
Get back! You're not supposed to be here! We need to get you out without her seeing.

SOPHIE
Do you have any of those full face cover headscarf thingies?

PETE
Niqab.

SOPHIE
Yeah those.

RAYA
Yeah.

SOPHIE
We could wear them and-

RAYA
No.

PETE
No! That's, like, so offensive, what is wrong with you?

SOPHIE
What? Raya how is that offensive?

PETE
(to RAYA) I'll explain it to her later.

47. INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Raya, Sophie and Pete creep down the stairs and make it to the front door. Raya quietly turns the latch. Saima appears.

SAIMA
Hello?

The three swing around.

RAYA
Mum!

PETE
Hi. Your home is really lovely.

SAIMA
Thank you... you are?

SOPHIE
I’m Sophie. This is Pete.

SAIMA
You’re the new friends.

RAYA
They’re just leaving.

PETE
Thanks for having us.

Sophie and Pete leave. Saima glares at Raya.

RAYA
What, so I’m not allowed to have friends over now?

SAIMA
I know who your friends are. They're not your friends. And you're grounded.

RAYA
They are my friends.

SAIMA
You can't just bring in anyone off the street! I need to meet people before they come into my house.

RAYA
Okay, you've met them now.

SAIMA
You've got an appointment tomorrow morning. It's early, be ready by nine.

RAYA
What appointment?

SAIMA
I don't want to argue. You know now, so just be ready.

48. INT. BEDROOM - EVENING

A text comes through to Raya's phone - it's Pete: AT FIELD. YOU COMING DOWN?

49. INT/EXT. BACK DOOR - EVENING

Raya sneaks out of the house, and into the garden.

50. INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

LATER THAT NIGHT...

Nasra's fallen asleep on the sofa holding a bowl of popcorn. Saima moves it onto the table and carries her out of the room.

51. INT. BACK DOOR/ KITCHEN - NIGHT

Raya gently closes the back door and creeps into the kitchen. Saima appears carrying a sleeping Nasra. They speak in whispers.

SAIMA
I'm not doing this anymore.
Wallahi, that's it now.

RAYA
I was just out for a little bit.

SAIMA
You are out of control.

RAYA
I didn't do anything, I swear, I
was just out.

Saima walks away silently. Raya sinks into a kitchen chair, and pulls out her phone.

52. INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - DAY

Saima walks in the room. Raya is up and dressed, and texting on her phone.

SAIMA
It's time to go.

RAYA
Where?

SAMIA
The appointment. Come and get your coat on.

RAYA
No, I've got to be somewhere.

SAIMA
What do you mean? You're grounded. And I told you yesterday, you have an appointment. Get your things, we're going.

RAYA
I *need* to meet Sophie and Pete, they're waiting for me.

SAIMA
I don't have time for rubbish, get your things.

53. INT. CAR - DAY

Raya taps frantically on her phone. Saima's eyes are fixed on the road ahead.

RAYA
Where are we even going?

SAIMA
Appointment.

RAYA
You keep saying that. *Appointment* for what?

Saima stares ahead.

RAYA (CONT'D)
For what? You’re not taking me to one of those army schools, are you? You know they abuse kids there? They get away with all sorts of stuff because they know the parents won’t ask questions.

SAIMA
I wouldn’t send you somewhere like that.

54. EXT. STREET - DAY

Nasra and Zahra walk side-by-side, Shemsa trails behind on the phone.

NASRA
I think we need to do it soon. My Mum’s trying to get rid of her.

ZAHRA
What do you mean?

NASRA
She knows about the shaytani. We went to this place and she was talking to this man. I couldn’t really understand them, but I think she’s going to send Raya away.

ZAHRA
When?

NASRA
Really soon. I think if we can make her better, and get the shaytani out of her, then everything will be alright again.

ZAHRA
You have all the stuff now. And you know what to do - just like we saw.

NASRA
I can't do it by myself, she's too strong.

ZAHRA
Let's ask my Mum if I can sleep over.

NASRA
Are you sure? You know it'll be really scary.

ZAHRA
I'm not scared. We can do this.

55. INT. HEALER'S APARTMENT - DAY

A WOMAN in a dark red *kitenge* and matching headscarf leads Saima and Raya into a room. She silently directs them towards some chairs. The walls are covered in oranging newspaper clippings and framed photographs of men in front of the Tanzanian flag. A free-standing shelf houses rows and rows of jars holding earthy powders and unidentifiable liquids. Lit candles and incense burners curl smoke around the room. The Woman leaves.

RAYA
What is this place?

SAIMA
We're getting some help.

A LARGE MAN (60s) with a hard, round belly walks in wearing a long, gold *kanzu* and an embroidered *kofia (hat)*. The hem skims the tips of his bare toes. He is DOCTARI. Saima stands.

RAYA
'Help' for what?

Doctari and Saima whisper in Swahili for a moment, then turn to Raya. Doctari wraps his teeth around each word before projecting it into the room.

DOCTARI
Raya, I am a doctor. People call me 'doctari'. (in Swahili; English subtitles) You speak Swahili?

SAIMA
(in Swahili; English subtitles) She only knows a little. She might understand but she can't speak.

DOCTARI
(in English) Your Mother has brought you to me
so that I can help you.

RAYA
With what?

SCREEN SPLITS:

UNCONSCIOUS LENS

SAIMA
You’re being led down the wrong path. He’s just going to read some *duas* for you, to help you.

INTERROGATED LENS

BLACK SCREEN

UNCONSCIOUS LENS

BLACK SCREEN

INTERROGATED LENS

Saima looks uncertain- nervous, even.

SAIMA (V.O)
My mother had two faces and a frying pot... where she cooked up her daughters... into girls. [2]

CUT TO:

56. INT. HEALER’S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - DAY

Doctari opens the door. The sun struggles to light the room through the blinds. On the red carpet floor, a circular bamboo mat has a velvet tassled pillow in the middle, surrounded by piles of red and grey powder. Along the edge are several chicken skulls, two small *ngoma* drums and a flip-screen camcorder on a tripod. A clay incense burner puffs from a sidetable next to the single bed, which is covered in a red satin sheet. Above the headboard are three dark wooden masks with long faces and wide, carved out mouths.

DOCTARI
We'll read some *duas*. We need to cleanse you and protect you from evil eyes.

Raya looks between them, then rolls her eyes. Doctari directs her into the room - she walks in. Saima goes to follow.

DOCTARI
(in Swahili; English subtitiles)
It's better if you don't stay.

SAIMA
(in Swahili; English subtitiles)
I thought we said I would come in for the beginning?

DOCTARI
To make her comfortable, but she's fine. She will respond better if you aren't there. People respond better when they aren't being watched.

UNCONSCIOUS LENS

SAIMA
Yes, okay, I'll just wait in the other room.

DOCTARI
You go - go home, relax. We'll call you when it's time to come back.

The Woman appears and leads Saima away.

INTERROGATED LENS

BLACK SCREEN. The sound of a HEART POUNDING - at a normal pace at first, then faster...

ANOTHER HEARTBEAT joins. They beat slightly out of sync.

The hearts beat LOUDER and LOUDER, FASTER and FASTER until they merge into one, CONTINUOUS THUMPING.

CUT TO:

57. INT. HEALER'S APARTMENT, BEDROOM - DAY

Raya sits crossed-legged on the pillow in front of Doctari. He's shuffling on his knees around her, waving a stick of incense, making chanting sounds.

DOCTARI
Close your eyes.

Raya obliges. He stands up and circles her with the incense, his eyes lingering on her body parts. He arrives full circle back in front of her, this time sitting cross-legged right up close to her. He lays the incense down and takes her hands. She opens her eyes.

DOCTARI
Stay relaxed.

He lets go of her hands suddenly, putting his own at the sides of his face whilst breathing deeply in and out. Raya opens her eyes and quickly sits on her hands.

DOCTARI
Something is wrong. This is bad, very bad. We'll need something stronger to make this work. Give me your hands please.

Raya reluctantly removes her hands from underneath her legs, holding them out. He mixes some red powder into a jar of liquid, then shakes it vigourously into a viscous gel. He then dips a finger in and puts a dot on each of her hands.

Placing one of her hands on each of his cheeks, he starts breathing heavily, in and out. She tries to pull her hands away, he grips them.

DOCTARI
Don't fight, it's working now.

Raya tries to pull her hands away again. Doctari takes her hands, spits in them, then rubs them on her face. He continues humming.

SCREEN SPLITS:

UNCONSCIOUS LENS

Doctari stands. From the corner of the room he produces a large bone. He hangs the *ngoma* drums around his body and circles her, banging them with the bone and vocalising. Chickens appear in the room - he continues to circle her, playing the drum with the bone, only now the sound is joined with chickens squawking. Feathers fill the air and the drummiing gets louder and louder until...
THE SCENE FREEZES.

INTERROGATED LENS

Raya's fully clothed, sitting in a bath full of clear water. She lays back then sinks down slowly until the water covers her mouth, then her nostrils, then she's submerged.

She opens her eyes abruptly underwater and sits up, clutching the sides of the bath and gasping for air...
THE SCENE FREEZES.

SCREENS REWIND:
[2]

BOTH SCREENS FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

58. EXT. HOUSE - DAY

TITLE OVER: PART TWO

A cream sky frames a mock-Tudor house. The lawn is neat - tufts of leaves rustle gently on a skinny tree. The car in the driveway faces outwards behind a slip of pavement.

The leaves on the tree start to shake more forcefully: the rustle and hiss builds in the wind.

RAYA (V.O)
It happened in autumn. I think there were storms. I remember the wind, hearing it wheeze and claw against the windows like it was this thing trying to find a way in. And then one day it did - it got in through the gaps in our house and it blew and blew and shook us all around until we knocked into each other.

59. INT. HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Raya slides onto the bottom bunk bed and snaps chunky wireless headphones over her ears. Laying back into the pillows, she sinks into the music [Arlo Parks, 'Too Good'].

RAYA
(singing)
I bought you breakfast and you started your rings/ The air was fragrant and thick with our silence/ I held my breath as something deep inside pinched/ I touched the bump on your wrist you were born with/ Watching you trying to push away/ It hurts when you see it coming/ You're too proud to tell me that you care/ Watching you tryin' to push away/It hurts when you see it coming/ Never use your words to show you care...

60. INT. CORRIDOR/KITCHEN - DAY

SONG CONTINUES INTO SCENE [Arlo Parks 'Too Good']

Two BLACK GIRLS skitter along a hallway. The shortest of the two, NASRA (8), is in a yellow fancy-dress ballgown - her hair is in four chunky cornrows tied into two bunches with matching yellow bobbles. She's wearing a fake pearl necklace and long, white, polyester gloves. She has recently put on, then wiped off, some of her mum's lipstick (which she'd deny if asked).

Raya's in dark blue denim jeans, an oversized plaid flannel shirt, and a baggy orange T-shirt. Her hair is pulled into an Afro puff but it's fuzzy and untame.

The girls approach the closed door ahead cautiously. MUSIC PLAYS - the same Arlo Parks song, now coming from the counter-top stereo. Saima(O.S) hums along. Raya gently pushes the door ajar. We hear Saima's voice (O.S) more clearly now. Raya watches for a moment.

Nasra shoves into Raya for a closer look, poking her gloved elbow forward until she negotiates a position in front. They watch quietly, peering through the slit in the door, as still as possible. Beyond the door Saima sings along, until her phone rings.

61. INT. TOILET/ HALLWAY

Saima empties the toilet bin and finds cupcake wrappers. There's a breeze against the window, branches outside tap against the mottled glass.

62. INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Saima, Raya and Nasra are sat around the circular kitchen table. There's a fourth empty chair.

SAIMA
Can anyone tell me why I've moved the cupcakes on top of the fridge?

RAYA
To keep them warm?

SAIMA
Very funny. It's not that.

NASRA
Hot air rises, cold air sinks. It's science.

RAYA
Exactly, *it's science*. You can't argue with science.

SAIMA
I'm not arguing with science.

RAYA
So are you agreeing that you physically can't argue with science? Like, it's a fact you can't argue with?

SAIMA
Where is this going?

RAYA
Nowhere, but are you saying it's on record - you're saying you can't argue with science?

SAIMA
Raya, stop twisting everything, *jamani*!

RAYA
I'm not! Those were literally your words. I'm just saying, we should record it or something.

SAIMA
I found empty cupcake wrappers in the toilet bin.

RAYA
Maybe it was the cat?

NASRA
Maybe it was a ghost?

RAYA
Well at least choose something that's actually possible.

NASRA
Ghosts are possible.

RAYA
Ghosts are not scientifically possible, and even if they were, how would they eat? They're a ghost!

SAIMA
It was you two. And you know it's against our religion to eat in the bathroom. And it's dirty.

RAYA
It's not like we poo on the floor just because it's the bathroom.

SAIMA
It's *haram*. It attracts wa shaytani.

RAYA
Why do they only want food that's in the bathroom?

NASRA
What do they look like?

RAYA
Red with horns. And its eyes are like, fiery orange, and its got these great big teeth and massive claws that rip faces off little girls. Especially eight-year-old girls.

SAIMA
Okay Raya, *basi*, why do you have to always take it too far?

63. INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

It's dim but not pitch black - light enough to make out the posters, drawings and clippings on the walls. One wall is more cutesy: animals, hearts, butterflies. The other has band photos and other magazine clippings. Nasra and Raya are in their bunk beds (Nasra on top, Raya on the bottom).

NASRA
Ry?

RAYA
I'm asleep.

NASRA
I need the toilet.

FASTFORWARD REST OF SCENE:

64. INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Flying leaves tap against the window. Nasra and Raya tip-toe along the hallway. The window sill hisses.

65. INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Raya steps onto the scales to weigh herself. She gently lifts a couple of toes off the scales - the dial doesn't move. Nasra flushes.

NASRA
Do you think (mouths) shaytani, is here now?

RAYA
Not unless you whistle.

Raya starts to whistle. Nasra throws toilet roll at her.

66.INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

The girls are in their own bunks. Nasra's delicately arranging soft toys along the edges of her bed, forming a border around the mattress. A DEEP, GUTTERAL WAIL disturbs her. Nasra scrambles under her bedding. Raya pounces out of bed.

NASRA
What was that?

RAYA
Stay here. I'll be back in a minute.

67. INT. STAIRS/ KITCHEN - NIGHT

Raya creeps downstairs. Saima is crying on a kitchen chair, her face in her hands. Raya wraps her arms around shoulders, and Saima clings back.

RAYA
What's happened?

SAIMA
My sister.

Saima breaks down and holds onto Raya.

68. EXT. PARK - DAY

Raya walks slowly, kicking piles of leaves, with an air of glumness about her. Nasra bounces around, scooping leaves into her arms and flinging them in the air.

NASRA
What's the house going to be like?

RAYA
I don't know.

NASRA
But you've been there before.

RAYA
So have you.

NASRA
But you're older. I don't remember.

RAYA
I don't remember either.

NASRA
Is it far from here?

RAYA
Quite far.

NASRA
How far? Like here to the airport?
Or further than that?

RAYA
I don't know.

NASRA
Well how long will it take?

RAYA
I *don't* know.

69. INT. WADA'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nasra sits beside a gurney covered in a white sheet. She's being comforted by a Woman. Raya and Nasra watch from across the room. Zuweina walks over.

ZUWEINA
Girls, you shouldn't be here to see this.

RAYA
We can't actually see her.

ZUWEINA
Why don't you go and play upstairs?

NASRA
There's no toys.

ZUWEINA
You know, when somebody is taken, it's not good for children to be around. Go on Raya, take your little sister upstairs.

70. INT. WADA'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Raya leans over the bannister, watching the adult women speak in hushed voices below.

NASRA
Shall we play hide and seek?

RAYA
No.

NASRA
Well, what do you want to play?

RAYA
I don’t want to play anything!

Raya walks off, into a bedroom. Nasra looks over at the open bathroom door.

71. INT. WADA’S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Saima’s still next to the gurney, staring ahead, as if catatonic. A Woman leans over.

WOMAN
They’re here.

Saima doesn’t respond.

WOMAN
Saima, it’s time.

The Woman gently shakes her shoulder.

SAIMA
They can wait.

72. INT. WADA’S HOUSE, BEDROOM - DAY

Raya runs her hand along the perfumes and pots on the dressing table. She looks at her reflection in the mirror, then notices a photograph wedged into its border.

She pulls the photo off. It’s Wada holding a TODDLER. She turns the photo over - handwritten on the back is: *Me and Raya, 2012*.

Beyond the door a WOMAN shrieks. Raya slips the photo into her pocket and turns to the door.

73. INT. WADA'S HOUSE - BATHROOM

Nasra stands on a footstool in front of the sink, a razor in hand, with half an eyebrow missing.

The Woman clasps her head with her hands then rushes over.

WOMAN 2
No, no, no. Put that down!

SEVERAL OTHER WOMEN rush up the stairs.

ZUWEINA
What's happening?

WOMAN 2
She's used the razor on her eyebrow.

The women all fuss - one grabs Nasra's face in her hands and inspects it closely.

WOMAN 3
Did you hurt yourself?

NASRA
No.

ZUWEINA
Are you cut?

NASRA
No.

WOMAN 3
Are you sure she's not bleeding?

The group of women all turn - Saima approaches and parts them. She bends down to look at Nasra's face.

SAIMA
Did you use it anywhere else?

NASRA
No.

SAIMA
Okay, come.

NASRA
I'm sorry, Mummy.

SAIMA
It's okay darling. (to the Women)
It's okay, she's okay.

ZUWEINA
Someone needs to throw all these away. It's not safe. These things aren't clean.

WOMAN 4
There's very little risk. Any blood on there would be dry. You can't transmit it from-

ZUWEINA
I'll do it myself then.

74. INT. WADA'S HOUSE, UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - DAY

Zuweina holds a pair of rubber gloves and a bin bag.

ZUWEINA
Raya, you should really watch your sister. You can't leave her around these things, it's not safe. People are still dying from it, you know. It hasn't gone away.

Alhamdullilah there's medicines now, but it's a very dangerous infection. You're the eldest. You need to be more grown up and help your Mum, yes?

RAYA
I was only in the other room.

ZUWEINA
Your Mum, *maskini*. She really tried. But what can you do? You have to be strong. Just like your Mum was for you, when you were a baby. Your Aunty, *marhem, inna-lillahi-wa'inna-ilayhi rajiun*, was sick, even before those other problems later. But it wasn't always like this. She used to be strong. It's so sad. But she forgot: (in Arabic with English subtitles) *Whoever therefore sees (with insight), it is to his own gain, and whoever be blind, it is to his own loss*.
Surah-Al-'An'am.

RAYA
What was she sick with?

ZUWEINA
(just realising Raya doesn't already know) Oh you're too young for all of that,
you're still a child. You just concentrate on helping your Mum.

75. INT. HOME, KITCHEN - DAY

Saima's sat on a little wooden stool, her hair wrapped up in a kanga. She's POUNDING yams with a large wooden pestle. Nasra observes.

NASRA
What are you making?

SAIMA
Ugali.

NASRA
It looks a bit like mashed potatoes.

SAIMA
I suppose it does.

NASRA
Can I help?

SAIMA
Yes actually, can you bring me water? Small cup.

NASRA
You normally only use that stool when you make *chapati*.

SAIMA
Here, pour a little water in, just a little. Perfect.

Saima continues working the mixture. Nasra watches with soft, curious eyes, absorbing the kind of images that turn into a fondly revisited memory. Saima thumps the mortar.

THE FRAME FREEZES, THEN UNPAUSES

Saima wipes the back of her hand across her forhead, leaving a smear of cornmeal powder on the side of her forhead.

THE FRAME FREEZES, THEN UNPAUSES

SAIMA
Come, you stir.

Saima stands allowing Nasra to sit. The *ugali* is stiffer than it looks - she’s mostly just poking at it with the pestle.

SAIMA (CONT'D)
Try moving in a circle from the sides... that’s it. It’s hard work isn’t it? This is our gym. We don’t need those exercise machines. My aunties, grandmothers, all of them. This was their gym.

NASRA
Wouldn’t it be easier to use a mixing machine for this?

SAIMA
It wouldn’t taste the same. You have to do it by hand. Anyway, it would need a great big machine and we don’t have space. And I hardly ever make it.

NASRA
How come you're making it now?

SAIMA
Because it was Aunty Wada's favourite. *Ugali* and *mchuzi*.

NASRA
But she's not here anymore.

SAIMA
No, she's not.

Raya appears, coat on and bag slung over her shoulder.

RAYA
I'm going out.

SAIMA
Where?

RAYA
Nowhere.

SAIMA
Raya, ah *jamani*! Come on, where are you-

The front door slams. Nasra shakes her head sincerely and solemly.

NASRA
Ah, *jamani*.

76. INT. HOUSE HALLWAY/KITCHEN - EVENING

The wind outside makes the letterbox flap. A key turns in the front door and Raya walks in. Saima comes into the hallway.

SAIMA
Where have you been?

RAYA
Out.

SAIMA
You can't just disappear whenever you want, you know. I worry.

RAYA
I didn't disappear, I was just out.

The front door isn't closed properly and wafts open. Raya pushes it closed.

SAIMA
I don't like how secretive you're becoming. The lying and the secrets. Where are you getting this from?

RAYA
Where do you think?

Raya heads for the stairs, Saima grabs her arm.

SAIMA
I'm warning you, do not push me-

RAYA
Or what? You'll drive me away like you did Aunty? Because she wanted to be her *own* person, not who *you* wanted her to be. You drove her away and now she's dead. And I'll never get to know her because of you.

Raya shakes her arm free and runs up the stairs. Saima stands for a few beats, looking at the hand that grabbed Raya's arm. She sinks into the stairs and closes her eyes.

CUT TO BLACK:

We hear GUN SHOTS and men shouting in KINYARWANDA.

We hear scythes, slapping and hacking, people screaming. We hear FOOTSTEPS RUNNING through, twigs crunching.

TEENAGE WAHDA (V.O.)
(in Swahili; English subtitles)
Keep running Saima, faster.

TEENAGE SAIMA (V.O.)
(in Swahili; English subtitiles)
The grass. It's so thick.

TEENAGE WAHDA (V.O.)
We're nearly there.

There's a big THUD, some small gasps, then the sound of crunching grass.

TEENAGE WAHDA (V.O.)
Please, spare us. Please.

MAN (V.O.)
And if I do, what do I get in return.

CUT BACK IN:

Saima opens her eyes.

WAHDA (V.O.)
Sahara.[3]
High above this desert I am
becoming absorbed.

Saima stands, breathing slowly in and out, in and out.

WAHDA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Plateaus of sand
Dentrites of sand
continents and islands and waddys
of sand
tongue sand
wrinkle sand
mountain sand
coasts of sand
pimples and pustules and maculaof
sand
dry lakes of sand
moon crators of sand...

Saima closes her eyes.

WAHDA (V.O) (CONT'D)
My own place sand
never another place sand
punishments of sand
hosannahs of sand
Epiphanies of sand
crevasses of sand
mother of sand
I've been here a long time sand
string sand
spaghetti sand...
army of trees sand

jungle of sand subterranean
treasure sand moonglade sand
male sand terrifying sand

She shakes her head vigourously for a few moments, then opens her eyes.

Saima walks into the kitchen, roughly pulls on some rubber gloves and starts washing up forcefully. She looks up at her reflection in the window. Behind her is WADA (46). She's too thin - her cheeks inverted, her eyes sallow and bulbous. She's hugging her twiglet arms. They stay still watching each other in the reflection of the window, until Wada's reflection breaks the silence:

WADA
Close your eyes.

SAIMA
But then you'll leave.

WADA
You need to listen to me.

SAIMA
Why should I listen to you? You never listened.

WADA
Close your eyes, and when you open them, you'll see.

SAIMA
No.

Saima turns around slowly. There's nobody there. She takes off the gloves.

77. INT. ZAHRA'S HOUSE, BEDROOM - DAY

Zahra, hair plaited in two pigtails, and Nasra, are on the floor surrounded by toys. There's a notebook between them.

ZAHRA
Okay, so what you need to do, is write down anything weird that happens in a diary.

NASRA
Okay... why?

ZAHRA
For evidence.

NASRA
Right. And then what?

ZAHRA
I don't know.

78. INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Saima and Nasra sit at the table eating. Raya sits down to eat. Nasra watches her stuff food into her mouth quickly.

SAIMA
I thought we could all watch something together tonight, as Zahra will be here?

RAYA
I'm going out at half eight, remember? You already said it was okay to go to Muna's. We have a project.

SAIMA
Did I? Okay. That’s a bit late to be going over to do homework.

RAYA
They’re visiting relatives, she’s not back until then. Anyway, it’s the holidays.

SAIMA
Why do you have to do it tonight?

RAYA
We want to get started. It’s a big project.

SAIMA
I don’t want you staying over.

RAYA
Her Mum’s giving me a lift back.

SAIMA
What time?

There’s a knock on the front door.

RAYA
I can’t demand a time.

NASRA
I’ll get it.

Saima and Raya continue to eat in silence. Saima looks up at Raya every now and again.

SAIMA
I should call her mum.

RAYA
She’s got a new number. I can give it to you. You should text though, she probably won’t be able to answer if they’re visiting people.

79. INT. HALLWAY - EVENING

NASRA
Did you bring it all?

Zahra swings the bag on her shoulder to the side.

NASRA (CONT'D)
Okay, quick, let’s get it upstairs.

80. EXT. HOUSE, BACK GARDEN - EVENING

Raya’s sat between the fence and a wheelie bin, tapping on her phone. She looks around - mainly towards the house - there’s no one around. She carries on with her phone.

A SERIES OF MESSAGES come through from Pete:

/ Mum can’t remember her name, but OMG

/ She found a photo. She’s just getting it

/ Of ur aunty & CUZ!!!

/ Will take a pic.

Raya stares at the phone screen, waiting. Leaves swirl around above her. The wind gets too much to stay outside: she stands and notices the leaves, which now surround her body. She reaches for a leaf, and they all fall abruptly to the ground.

81. INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - EVENING

Raya shoves a jumper, scarf, hat and gloves into a backpack.

She messages Pete: Hello??? Photo? I'm gonna just come now.

She flops forwards onto the bed, clasping her phone. Eventually it buzzes. A picture comes through from Pete: the same PHOTO OF WADA AND RAYA she found in Wada's room. She sits up; she's confused at first, but then slowly starts to processes what she's seeing. She starts to cry and shake, struggling to catch her breath. She looks over at the door, then window, then her backpack. Finally, with nowhere to go, she pulls herself under her duvet and sobs.

82. INT. GIRLS BEDROOM - NIGHT

A COUPLE OF HOURS LATER.

Nasra and Zahra peer over the side of the lower bunk bed. Raya's fallen asleep. Nasra reaches under the bed for the bag Zahra brought earlier. She pokes Raya's arm: nothing. She prods harder. Raya inhales deeply then rolls into her pillow.

From the bag, Nasra pulls out a rope and hands it to Zahra. She gently gets Raya's hands and winds the rope around her wrists whilst Zahra does her feet.

Raya wakes, disoriented.

RAYA
What - what's going on?

Raya tries to release her hands but can't - she's more awake now.

RAYA
Nasra, what are you doing? Untie me you weirdos.

ZAHRA
Remember, that’s not really her. Don’t let it trick you.

NASRA
Zahra, pass the ZamZam water.

SCREEN SPLITS:

UNCONSCIOUS LENS

The girls each take turns dousing Raya in ZamZam water whilst Nasra recites from the Qur'an. Her voice has changed to that of an older woman with a sinister twinge to it. AFTER A FEW BEATS, THE PANEL CUTS TO BLACK.

INTERROGATED LENS

SCREEN STAYS BLACK, UNTIL THE LEFT SCREEN CUTS TO BLACK, THEN: The girls each have a bottle, and take turns to douse RAYA.

NASRA
Where's it meant to go?

ZAHRA
I guess just all over?

Nasra pours a load on Raya's face.

ZAHRA (CONT'D)
Oh em gee don't drown her! She's still in there.

NASRA
Well you said everywhere!

ZAHRA
Obviously not her face though.

NASRA
You're saying obviously but I've never done it before!

ZAHRA
Well neither have I!

CUT TO:

INTERROGATED LENS CONT'D

RAYA
What the hell, Nasra?

NASRA
Is it supposed to know my name?

ZAHRA
It knows everything, that's how it tricks you.

RAYA
I have no idea what you're doing, but stop it, right-

ZAHRA
-Don't listen to it. Should I read a *Surah*?

RAYA
What do you mean '*it*'? Untie me, seriously, I need to the toilet.

Nasra and Zahra recite a *Surah* in unison. Whilst they recite it:

RAYA
Seriously, I need to get to the toilet now!

Raya starts yanking on the rope.

NASRA
I don't think this is working.

In the film she was shaking around
and her eyes changed and stuff.

83. INT. HOUSE, KITCHEN - NIGHT

Saima's covering leftovers in cling film. She finishes then pauses, fixed on the food. She turns to look behind her right shoulder: Wada's face is right there, up close. Saima jumps - knocking the plate of *ugali* off the counter-top. Wada breaks its fall and nudges it back onto the surface.

Saima and Wada stand face to face. Wada looks sullen and pained, but her eyes search with warmth. Her cream blouse is creased, but stainless.

WADA
Close your eyes.

SAIMA
I don't want you to leave.

WADA
I have to go.

SAIMA
No!

WADA
Close your eyes, and open them.

There's a thud from upstairs that they both look towards. Wada looks back to Saima and nods. Wada closes her eyes. Her lips are hardened in flakes of set skin. Dark blusher cuts sharply across her jutting cheekbones.

Saima closes her eyes - the screen FOLDS INTO BLACK. In the distance there's muffled overlapping noises, bullets and footsteps, a heartbeat, a girl shouting, girls shouting indecipherable words, footsteps pounding and gunshots cracking, and two heartbeats, ever so slightly out of sync and then... It's just girls shouting, distorted like it's underwater, until:

RAYA (O.S.)
Mum!

Saima opens her eyes. Wada's points up to the floor above.

84. INT. GIRLS BEDROOM - NIGHT

Raya turns to the side of the bed and vomits. Nasra and Zahra jump back. Raya wipes her mouth with the backs of her tied hands, then sits back.

RAYA
Can you, please, please untie me.

ZAHRA
I think it worked. It came out.

Nasra nods. They jump up and down hi-fiving each other.

NASRA AND ZAHRA
(sing-song) We did it! We did it!

RAYA
Will you just untie me? I've literally just thrown up, what is the matter with you both!

Saima bursts in.

SAIMA
La'how'Allah. What is going on in here?

CUT TO BLACK.

SAIMA (V.O.)
It was autumn. There were storms. The wind knocked against the windows, trying to find a way in. And then it did - it got in through the gaps and it blew and it shook us until we crashed into each other.

85. INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

FADE IN.

Saima unties Raya, then rushes to get some tissues and cloth to wipe her face and cover the vomit on the floor. She gestures at Nasra and Zahra to clean up the mess, and helps Raya stand.

86. INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Saima sits Raya on the side of the bath and fills the sink with soapy water. She dips in a flannel, wrings it, then brings it to Raya's face, wiping it tenderly from her forehead, down the sides of her cheeks and to her chin and neck. Raya is soothed for a while, but then turns her face away.

SAIMA
What happened?

RAYA
I told them I felt sick.

SAIMA
Why were you tied up?

RAYA
I was asleep. I woke up and they'd tied me up.

SAIMA
Why?

RAYA
I dunno, ask them. They were chucking water at me.

SAIMA
It must be some game they've learned at school. *La'how'Allah*, this country. Are you okay? You still feel sick?

RAYA
A little bit.

SAIMA
Come to lie down in my room, I'll get you some hot ginger.

Saima releases the water from the sink, which ripples and swirls as it rounds into the plughole.

RAYA
I know about Aunty. I know the truth.

The sink bubbles and glugs as it forces the last of the water down the drain.

SAIMA
What do you know?

Raya starts to cry. Saima rushes to comfort her. Raya's breath jaggers and her tears stream, her body builds an uncontrollable sob. Saima holds her in a close hug.

RAYA
She's... you're not... my... Mum... she is!

SAIMA
Darling, what is it? 'She's' what?

RAYA
You're not my Mum! She is!

Raya pulls away and moves onto the floor, hugging her knees. She's wailing now. Saima's tearing up and shaking her head.

SAIMA
What are you saying?

RAYA
(shouting through sobs) The nursery. When she lived in South Street - I lived with her. From the photo. She took me to the nursery. Then you took me away from her!

Saima rushes to Raya's side, pulling Raya's head into her chest.

SAIMA
No, no. That's not how it was. Listen to me, okay? I am your Mum. Wada is not your Mum. I am your Mum, I promise you, wallahi.

RAYA
So why did I live with her?

SAIMA
You were there... I had to go back home to do something. Something I needed to do.

RAYA
Why didn’t you take me?

SAIMA
Because I wasn’t very well. Wada back then, she was helping me a lot. It was before she got too sick. She looked after you for me, while I was gone. You went to the nursery near her house sometimes, when she was working.

RAYA
How long was I there for?

Raya sits up. Saima avoids eye contact, looking searchingly around the room as tears fill her eyes - the window, the door - finally she looks at her daughter.

SAIMA
A year. I thought it would be better if I didn’t tell you. I didn’t want you to know, not like this.

Raya’s making sense of things in her mind - she’s calmer now and contemplative. Saima’s hand strokes Raya’s wrist. She’s looking - hoping - for Raya’s face to soften with some form of peace.

RAYA
So... we spent a lot of time together, me and her? We were close?

SAIMA
Very close. She loved you so much. And you loved her too.

There are squeals and shrieks (from the bedroom).

NASRA (O.S.)
Oh no! *Help*! *Mummy - HELP*!

Saima and Raya immediately stand and rush to the door.

87. INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

SAIMA
What's happened? What's going on? Are you okay?

Zahra points to something obscured on the floor. Nasra is nowhere to be seen. Raya lurks at the doorway as Saima... very slowly... approaches where Zahra is pointing.

A CAT is licking the vomit on the floor. Nasra peers out from under her duvet.

NASRA
Salem's eating the puke - it's disgusting!

88. SAIMA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Saima sits on the bed, gripping the edge, catching her breath.

GLIDE THROUGH
TO:

89. INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Raya washes her face, looking up into the mirror closely once the suds are rinsed away.

GLIDE THROUGH
TO:

90. INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Nasra and Zahra are busy pouring and stirring ingredients into a mixing bowl. Saima walks in.

NASRA
Surprise! We're making cupcakes.

Saima smiles at them both and kisses Nasra on the top of the head.

91. INT. GIRLS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

Laying on the bed, Raya holds her mobile phone, hovering over a MUNA'S NAME on the screen. She almost puts the phone down next to her, then presses call and lifts it to her face.

MUNA (O.S.)
Finally! We talking again now?

RAYA
Yeah, we're talking. Sorry for...
you know.

MUNA (O.S.)
I'm sorry too. You've got stuff
going on, I know you don't mean it.
What you doing?

RAYA
Well, I think Nasra and her friend just tried to do an exorcism on me.

MUNA (O.S.)
What? Wait, what do you mean? Like in a horror film, demon, type of exorcism?

RAYA
Yep, like tying me up and chucking water in my face.

MUNA (O.S.)
Kids these days are weird, man. Although, you're calling me, so maybe it worked?

RAYA
I guess so!

CUT TO:

92. EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

The Juneberry tree shakes - the wind practically screeches. Leaves blow around, flittering about the car and the side of the house.

93. INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Saima pulls the cakes out of the oven then sets them onto the table.

NASRA
Can we eat them now?

SAIMA
They'll taste nice with icecream, I think.

Raya tentatively opens the kitchen door. Nasra jumps up and down in front of her, tugging her arm and pulling her in.

NASRA
We made cupcakes! Do you want a cupcake?

RAYA
Yeah, actually, that would be really great.

LATER...

Saima, Raya, Nasra and Zahra are tucking into cupcakes and icecream. Nasra and Zahra are chatting away: Saima and Raya are quiet, but content.

The doorbell rings. Saima stands from the table.

CUT TO:

94. INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Saima opens the door to Shemsa.

SAIMA
Come in, it's so windy out there.

SHEMSA
I know! It's meant to pass soon, *Alhamdullilah.*

Nasra and Zahra run into the hallway.

ZAHRA

Mummy!

SHEMSA

Did you have a good time? I hope you were good?

ZAHRA

We made cupcakes! And we got rid of the shaytani!

Shemsa looks perplexed. Saima's starting to connect the dots, but then -

SHEMSA

You children and your imaginations! Come on then, say thank you, we've got to rush, I've left Bibi.

ZAHRA

Thank you for having me!

SAIMA

You're welcome mama.

Zahra gathers her things and eventually she and Shemsa are ready to leave. Nasra opens the door with Saima's help, and they both stand and wave from the doorway.

Raya walks up behind them. Shemsa and Zahra drive off. When they pull away, leaves on the front lawn form spirals, mini tornados, whirling gently in place.

NASRA

Woah, look at that!

The three of them stand watching - Saima's in the middle with an arm on each of her daughters.

She looks at Nasra's face, wide and mesmerized, then at Raya's face - choked frozen in shock. Saima follows Raya's eyeline ahead. Wada stands to the side of the Juneberry tree. Their eyes meet - Wada smiles and nods. Saima lingers... when she's ready she nods at Wada, then leans down to Raya and Nasra.

SAIMA
Close your eyes.

Arms still around them, she covers their eyes with each hand, glances at Wada then closes her eyes.

CUT TO BLACK:

FADE IN.

The wind has stopped, the leaves have fallen onto the lawn. The tree is still, Wada is gone. Raya and Nasra look ahead in wonder (did their Mum just make that happen?)

95. EXT/INT. HOUSE - FRONT DOORWAY - NIGHT

Saima pulls her girls in close. She kisses Raya on top of the head, then Nasra, then she alternates back and forth, dashing between them, kissing their heads and faces as they rush to catch her to kiss her back. It makes them laugh. Saima shuts the door.

NASRA (V.O.)
It was autumn and there was a big storm. The wind bashed into the house and shook us all around and around until we knocked into each other.

And when we stopped, the wind
danced, just for us.

FADE TO BLACK.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Lorde, A. (1995). ‘From The House of Yemanjá’, in *The Black Unicorn*. New York: Norton, pp.6-7

[2] SCREENS REWIND:

Once the SPLIT SCREENS have been frozen for a few beats, everything we’ve seen so far REWINDS (in reverse order). This rewind is as fast as possible, we can barely identify specific scenes - all we know is that we are rewinding right back to the beginning, to the first scene of the screenplay, outside the house.

[3] Lorde, A. (1995). ‘Sahara’, in *The Black Unicorn*. New York: Norton, pp.16-17

CONCLUSION

> "For those of us who write, it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it. For others, it is to share and spread also those words that are meaningful to us. But primarily for us all, it is necessary to teach by living and speaking those truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone we can survive, by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing, that is growth."
>
> Audre Lorde, 'The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action', *Sister Outsider* (2007, p.32)

This thesis set out to ask:

- Who is the Black Muslim Woman in British cinema?
- How has she been constructed within the landscape of the cultural imagination?
- Where is the Black woman in British cinema?
- Why is there a dearth in the presence and characterisation of this particular identity?

Rather than a socio-historical analysis, this thesis has served as an observation of the contemporary cinematic landscape that has birthed certain 'blind spots' with regards to representation. I explained the strategies and explored the tools used to reinforce particular narratives, and this, in turn, led me towards an interrogation of my own practice and complicity in reproducing character and story for the screen. In this study I have offered reasons as to why Black Muslim women may not be protagonists in the wider landscape of British cinema, whilst taking stock of some of the contradictions and (mis)representations at play. I developed practical awareness that I deployed at a text level, to address how to embark on a meaningful centring of Black Muslim womanhood for the screen.

My objective with this thesis was to develop a contextualised, cultural and theoretical understanding of the dearth of Black Muslim women in British Cinema amongst the wider landscape of Muslim female representation on screen, and to then feed that understanding into a consciously oppositional (hooks, 2003, p.99) screenwriting process.

In doing so, I considered the colonially influenced attributes that permeate representation of the 'other' on screen, and connected this conscious opposition to a theoretical undoing of colonial gaze, postulating the decolonial nature of the process.

The Black, Muslim, Woman Blind Spot

In exploring 'othered' Muslim female representations on screen against locating the Black Muslim Woman as a character, my research found that existing parameters of colonially-influenced narrative scope may not align with the culturally imagined Black woman with the culturally imagined Muslim woman. If they cannot share the same imagined narrative qualities, the dearth may exist because they cannot be imagined as easily within the cultural sphere.

Womanism as a Decolonial (screen)writing framework

Womanism and Womanist theory, critiquing the privilege of gender above race and class concerns, already has a set of criteria applicable to the analysing of film through a Womanist lens (Missouri, 2015, p.28). Its application could feasibly translate to screenwriting, by ensuring the script adhered to and conversed with, the following:

- Narrative content which constructs Black Womanist subjectivity and the various processes by which an audience might receive the narrative's construction of this subjectivity. "Womanist film is more concerned with Black female subjectivity and Womanist sensibilities that address issues of social injustice on various fronts, than with authorship." (Missouri, 2015, p.29)
- Imaginatively representing the socio-psychic and socio-economic experiences of African and African diasporic women.
- An understanding that not all films made by or centring Black women as the protagonists are automatically Womanist films, and in turn films directed or written by those who are not Black women can still be considered Womanist (Missouri, 2015, pp.28-29).

Whilst not the primary focus of discussion of this thesis, *Shedding* is a Womanist screenplay in the following ways:

- It is a narrative told from the position/ lens of Blackness.
- It explores central themes speaking to that subjective experience.
- It incorporates techniques aware of/ engaged with African-diasporic tradition (oral storytelling, cultural and traditional beliefs)

However, using this framework as the sole, definitive, exhaustive exercise in decolonising writing may not suit certain types of stories, which otherwise could be considered to utilise decolonised representations. Relying so heavily on the work integrating an African-diasporic tradition, could limit and restrict narratives to solely telling stories 'about' race – thereby 'performing' race above self-defining the nature of the story. For writers of colour, one's racial identity is the predominant way in which society understands and perceives them. Beth Loffreda and Claudia Rankine describe this knowledge of one's own race in relation to society as "a place of being addressed, and accessed" (2016, p.16). To be a person of colour is to always be addressable and accessed as such. "So one's imagination is influenced by the recognition of the need to account for this situation – even in the imagination, one feels accountable, one feels one must counter" (p.16) A writer of colour may wish to "exit that place of addressability," within their screenwriting practice, which a Womanist framework would not allow (p.16).

Towards a Conscious, Interrogated, Decolonial Practice

An eventual goal could be the development of a widely usable framework whereby conscious decolonial interrogation is applied specifically through the lens of decolonisation at a script level, with the clear objective of allowing hybrid, intersectional identities greater opportunity to both occupy space, and for those depictions within the space to align with a wider spectrum of characterisations. In a wider sense, it would be a challenge to encourage a commercial industry to adopt such a framework, so the more obvious next step would be to engage further with scholars and filmmakers working within and adjacent to Black feminism, Womanist theory, cultural studies, critical race theory and similar, who are exploring film as a "valuable mechanism" for resistance and exploring more widely "subjective artistic expression through whichever creative process, to convey, share, emote, learn, captivate, wonder, agitate and organise." (Emejulu and Sobande, 2019, p.273)

This thesis is not a finite resolution into how to concretely decolonise (screen)writing, but it is an example of how that space may be occupied, interrogating the writing choices through a consciously decolonising lens. As evidenced through the screenwriting element of this thesis, and subsequently through my integration of original draft attempts into my final script, it is not enough to solely be of a particular identity – that does not constitute a decolonised work of (screen)writing. It is a process of consciously undoing the deeply embedded codes and conventions engrained by colonial structures and thought, forming cultural assumptions associated with the concept of 'Blackness', of Muslim womanhood, and of Black womanhood. It is about confronting the 'psychopathological tendencies' created by colonial racism to inform restrictive stereotypes and tropes, which limit expressions of hybrid identities in all forms.

Further Research Avenues

I set out to fill a gap that I perceived to be present in the representation of Black Muslim womanhood in British Cinema, aiming to explore the reasoning for its 'lack' in order to better understand how to go about filling it. Centring my Black Muslim characters through a decolonised lens offered the most authentic feeling way, as a creative writer, to achieve this, linking the undoing process as part of the creative piece, so that the undoing itself becomes a part of the narrative arc. It is an exploration; not a question of black and white, or right or wrong. It is about opening up space, and extending beyond existing limitations that prevent intersectional identities from meaningfully occupying spaces within the cultural imagination.

It was beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse the roots and causes of existing representations or the reasons for filmmakers making specific characterisation choices. That said, such a socio-historic cultural study may indeed offer new insights. It would be interesting to further explore the representation of Black women within the context of the UK Film Industry, focusing on implementation and influence, and drawing on, for instance, the works of Anamik Saha whose paper, 'Beyond Diversity: enabling race-making in the cultural industries,' discusses the falling short of diversity initiatives within the cultural industries, which he describes to "reproduce reactive tropes" that do not address the "politics of representation" (2018a). In his book, *Race and the Cultural Industries* (2018b), Saha argues for a "radical diversity" encompassing an approach that doesn't commodify race and reproduce, but rather one that challenges executives' and commissioners' "industry lore" – a call for a de-emphasis on numbers and greater emphasis on production. Coming from this angle to view

Black, Muslim, female characterisation would explore how far access to production restricts certain writer's stories actually making it to production. The UK film and television industry would be a facet to explore in this instance, as a gatekeeper in terms of which narratives — which films and what kind of representation — get selected to be presented for wider cultural consumption.

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