

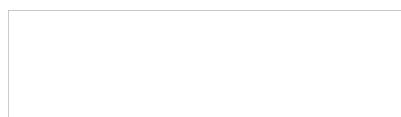
London School of Economics and Political Science

# Beyond Transnationality: A Queer Intersectional Approach to Transnational Subjects

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## **Declaration**

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## **Abstract**

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This thesis conceptually explores the becoming of transnational subjects. Critical interventions into disciplinary modes of knowledge production on such subjects have long problematised uni-dimensional, essentialist and identitarian approaches, but have had a limited impact on the mainstream(s) they address. In a postdisciplinary move, this thesis reads the literatures on transnational social spaces in migration studies, poststructuralist and new materialist insights on subject formation, intersectional approaches in gender studies and queer theory through one another to propose a queer-intersectional approach to transnational subjects.

Shifting the focus to the spaces transnationality takes place in rather than normatively defined ethnic and national communities, and interrogating intersectionality's tendency to mark out particularly gendered and racialised bodies for intersectional analysis allows for exploring heterogeneity and multiplicity within transnational spaces. The queering of intersectionality disrupts

the reliance on binary variables of much transnational migration research, towards a situated analysis of the becoming of subjects in and through the transnational space. In doing so, it not only complicates the here/there binarism transnational studies have relied on, but calls heteronormative assumptions underlying gender and transnational migration research into question, and draws attention to the relationship between transnationality, gender, sexualities and the (non-)normative alignments across those and other axes of difference. In an illustrative case study, this queer intersectional approach to the becoming of transnational subjects is then put into critical dialogue with the British South Asian transnational space through an analysis of scholarly representations of British Asians, the Channel 4 dramas *Britz* and *Second Generation*, and a Tumblr blog.

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# Chapter One: Introduction

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*“As opposed to the images of both the migrant and the exile, I want to emphasise that of the nomad. The nomad does not stand for homelessness, or compulsive displacement; it is rather a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity. This figuration expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity.” (Braidotti 1994: 22)*

This thesis conceptually explores the becoming<sup>1</sup> of transnational subjects. It is interested in how disciplinary modes of producing knowledge limit the ways in which the transnationalised Other can be encountered, and produce difference differently according to the boundaries within which questions are posed. I examine how the conceptual literatures on transnational social spaces in transnational migration studies, poststructuralist and new mate-

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout my thesis I use the term becoming – becoming transnational, transnational becomings, becoming subject, the becoming of transnational subjects and so on – with reference to fluid Deleuzean becomings. It shifts the focus from static being (any one particular thing), respectively from ever fully achieving stable subjecthood to shifting transformations, and thus captures well the processual and relational nature of what I might otherwise have called subject formation in transnational spaces. Deleuze and Guattari theorise becomings as disruptive of binary oppositions and emphasise that they take place in-between: “[t]he only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between, to pass between (...) never ceasing to become” (1987: 323). Becomings are not a transformation from one thing into another, but “flows whose intersections define unstable points of transitory identity” where no fixed identity is the end point. Becoming is multiple, always becoming-other and “multiple becomings rather than unitary becoming” (Joughin 1990: 186). While my thesis as such is not particularly Deleuzean in its theorisation, the use of becomings resonates with the challenge to think differently that all Deleuzean concepts pose (Colebrook 2002; Braidotti 1997). It serves as a constant reminder that my work is interested in becoming transnational and the ways in which scholarly work might engage with such processes of becoming rather than in what a transnational subject is.

rialist insights on subject formation, intersectional approaches in gender studies, queer theory, as well as feminist and queer interventions into transnational migration research complement each other in fruitful ways and illustrate one another's limitations. While some of those approaches share a concern with similar (if not the same) social relations, spaces and subjects, they have often evolved in parallel rather than in dialogue. Transnationalism, for instance, was itself introduced as a critical intervention in a scholarly landscape in migration studies fraught with uncritically linear and binary thinking (immigrant/emigrant, sending/receiving country, permanent/return, origin/destination) to point to durable connections and interactions within and across those categories. Transnational theory has not, however, fully succeeded in addressing the methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003, 2002) it problematises, and has at times had a tendency of reifying a binary notion of transnationality. The feminist intervention of "bringing gender in" has taken place twice in this context, first in migration studies (cf. Morokvašić 1984), and then again in transnational migration studies (cf. Pessar and Mahler 2003), and long since demonstrated the persuasiveness with which gender as a category of analysis permeates both. The resulting gender aware analyses of transnational migration and spaces, however, have often reduced gender to a binary variable with the attributes male/female while remaining rather inattentive to the underlying power relations and heteronormative assumptions. Queer interventions into migration studies have

emphasised the importance of sexualities as well as normativities in migration research, and have pointed to the relevance of queer beyond queer subjects. Given their primary focus on queer bodies crossing borders in different geopolitical contexts, however, those insights have largely remained confined to a rather small critical sub-discipline within scholarship on migration and transnational migration. Intersectionality, on the other hand, has had immense impact within gender studies in showing how multiple axes of power and differentiation operate through one another to produce multiple oppressions as well as subjects. Its uptake outside of gender studies and feminist activism, however, has been limited.

These interventions (and many more) are clearly important in that they have addressed significant shortcomings in their respective fields, and continue to do so. It is my contention in this thesis, however, that a closer dialogue between and across such critical interventions has the potential of moving their critique closer to the mainstreams they address. This dialogue is situated within a wider trajectory of critical thinking about practices of representation (scholarly and otherwise), power relations, and differences that matter<sup>2</sup> (Ahmed 2004), as well as the modes of knowledge production that address and occasionally (re)produce them. This thesis participates in this trajectory in

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<sup>2</sup> My use of the expression “differences that matter” and related terminology throughout this thesis is inspired by Ahmed’s (2004) book of that name. It is reflective of her engagement with difference(s) between and within disciplines, between and within subjects, and with her call to grapple with the question which differences matter time and again, to “admit to the differences that we cannot name - as well as those we cannot not name” (2004: 196). Additionally, I draw on the double entendre of the word matter - to matter as in to be significant and important, and to matter in Barad’s (2003; 2007) use, as in mattering, to materialise, to become matter, physical matter and/or materiality.

the belief that theory is practice (Foucault and Deleuze 1977), that the modes by which scholarly knowledge is produced are political (Harding 1991; Haraway 1988), and that this matters deeply to the kinds of knowledge about the social world that become possible. In this vein, the original contribution of this thesis is to engender a critical dialogue between the scholarly literatures on transnationalism, intersectionality and queer theory. This dialogue engages with the ways in which these sets of scholarship have the potential to draw on one-anothers' strengths to, in turn, partially mitigate against one-anothers' shortcomings, and results in the proposal of a queer intersectional approach to transnational social spaces. Methodologically, I position queering as a postdisciplinary practice, and propose in turn that postdisciplinarity has the potential to queer scholarly disciplines and modes of knowledge production.

My intention is not to pitch one set of literature against the other, nor to critique any of the literatures I engage with to the point of dismissal. On the contrary, in the belief that they all offer important insights relevant to the study of transnational subjects, I place them into dialogue with one another in novel ways. This dialogue, of course, would be impossible to think of independently from the literatures that serve as protagonists in it. Postdisciplinarity relies on the disciplinary canons it seeks to challenge, just as arguing for an intersectional approach to transnational space builds on the transnationality it problematises, and the queering of intersectionality takes the intersectional

theory it critiques so seriously that it insists on its value for theorising and researching transnational subjects. The bodies of literature I engage with throughout this thesis thus undergo what Brah (1996: 207) has called “a kind of theoretical creolisation”, where different conceptual approaches that are concerned with similar subject matters from different analytical perspectives “are best understood as constituting a point of confluence and intersectionality where insights emerging from these fields inhere in the production of analytical frames capable of addressing multiple, intersecting, axes of differentiation” (1996: 207) across fields of inquiry. The figure of the nomad (Braidotti 1994) invoked in the opening quote to this chapter thus not only hints at the conceptual dialogue at the heart of this thesis, but equally at the modes of inquiry this researcher inhabits.

The thesis is presented in two parts, where part I engages transnationalism, intersectionality, and queer theory in conversation and proposes a queer intersectional approach to transnational becomings; and part II discusses this approach through an illustrative case study situated in the British Asian transnational space. I should state from the outset that the illustrative case study in Part II of this thesis does not primarily aim at contributing to any empirical body of research on South Asian communities in Britain. In fact, to *a priori* presume such a “transnational community” based on national, ethnic or cultural belongings would stand in contrast to the conceptualisations of

the transnational space as open-ended and fluid that chapter two relies on. The purpose of the case study is to place my conceptual work into critical conversation with the transnational becomings it addresses. The case study thus queer-intersectionally examines representational practice in scholarly work on British Asians, in the television dramas *Britz* and *Second Generation*, and in a Tumblr<sup>3</sup> situated within the British Asian transnational space. The case study is fully introduced in chapter five, where I also provide a rationale for my choice of case.

The remainder of this introduction first reflects on how my orientation around the subject/object of this project came about, to then proceed by the means of three topical clusters that, taken together, provide an overview of the main conceptual stakes the thesis and its case study engage with. The section *Caught between two cultures?* illustrates the parallels between portrayals of British Asians as caught between cultures and the concept of transnational bifocality that some scholarship on transnationalism has relied on. It does so through a preliminary, rather paranoid (Sedgwick 2003: 130), reading of the television dramas that the case study will engage with more generously in part II of the thesis. The sections *Intersectionally transnational* and *Queerly intersectional* then introduce the conceptual dialogue that will unfold in part I of this thesis. Next, the chapter engages with some methodological concerns en-

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<sup>3</sup> Tumblr is the name of a popular microblogging platform, which I introduce more fully in chapter seven. At the same time, the word Tumblr stands in as a generic term for individual blogs hosted on the platform.

countered in the course of this project and situates the present thesis as post-disciplinary in approach. The chapter finally provides a brief structural outline of the thesis.

### **Implicated trajectories**

This section briefly attempts to situate the trajectory of this PhD project in my own to give a sense where my work is “coming from”. My project is the result of a wish to make visible the connections between a number of recurring themes in my personal and academic life. I write to “make visible” rather than “draw” connections because they are neither new nor artificial but in some ways were with me long before I had the tools to tease them out, or the (academic) language to name and address them. The beginning of this trajectory, I have come to understand with hindsight, is not to be found in the PhD proposal I submitted with my application towards a place to pursue doctoral research. Here, I briefly draw on two formative moments that have brought this project about to convey a sense of how I came to do the research that, in its becoming, materialised this thesis. One such moment was the result of a career counselling session on offer at my secondary school. While not entirely helpful in deciding on my next steps after leaving school, one exercise in particular stuck with me. In an attempt to determine what professional fields

might resonate with me, I was asked to keep a journal for a few weeks on what topics were to catch my interest in the news media. The weeks I kept that journal were the first time I more or less consistently followed the news media at all. The outcome of this exercise was that I found myself particularly interested in debates around migration, asylum, and social justice related coverage. This was when I first became aware that I had political interests and that they may indeed matter (for my professional future, as well as for the future of the societies I live in). Much later, academic studies brought me in touch with theoretical flavours to those interests. The second formative moment I refer to here consists of a seminar on diaspora and transnationalism, attended early on in my university studies. This seminar opened up beginnings to think through some of the questions around migration and identity that I had become interested in through personal histories of childhood migrations, through years spent in rather privileged alternative European youth cultures where anti-racism and migrant-rights protests were essentially a fashion statement, and through personal interests in diasporic film and literature. Additionally, that same seminar afforded me entry points to think through my own, often invisible (read: masked by whiteness) yet ever so present transnationality. Although I came to queer culture proper relatively late (and queer theory even later), the ways in which I now use queering, resonate with subtle ways in which that invisible transnationality manifests as not quite being one or the other and never quite fitting dominant frames of refer-

ence. My interests over the years evolved as nomadically as the thesis has over the PhD trajectory. Themes that have been with me for the greater part of my life, in personal experiences, in friends, in family, in books, in films and later in lecture series, seminars, and in different kinds of books, have received terminology and theoretical perspectives, and have been renamed, have shifted, have collided and merged until, at least for now, they consolidate as transnational, queer, and intersectional. Much of my work has been based on a hunch that there was something there – that if I looked hard enough or dug deep enough, the different frames of reference and theories that speak to me so forcefully might also have something meaningful to say to one another.

While these snippets of narrative may go some way towards situating the theoretical trajectory my work has taken – from personal and political interests to their academic framing – it falls somewhat short when considering the case study in part II of this thesis. There is no linear narrative that leads to the thesis at hand, or to its case study, in any straightforward way. Nor do I wish there was – as this thesis itself might demonstrate, I prefer entanglements. In addition to the notes on how the researcher's orientation around her object of study matters (Ahmed 2010, 2006) that conclude the section *Thinking methodology through postdisciplinarity* at the end of this chapter, however, the use of the British Asian transnational space as the subject of the case study warrants consideration of the stakes in such a choice. My own transnationali-

ty that partially informs the theoretical trajectory of this project, and the transnationality that renders representations of the British Asian transnational space as available to research projects like this one, seem to inhabit different discursive regimes (Foucault 1976). Which spaces or “communities” are constructed as available for inquiry speaks to the ways in which knowledge is produced, respectively which knowledges are deemed in need of production in the first place. The wealth of material to draw on in a case study on the British Asian transnational space – decades of scholarly engagement, literature, popular culture, media representation – testifies to its construction as a worthwhile subject of study. Indeed, as Chow points out, “‘minority discourse’ becomes a hot topic in cultural studies in the West” (1993: 109). Puwar (2003) problematises the ways in which such material “function[s] as second-order mediations on the, still, mysterious world of Otherness” and argues that “[t]he effect of the continuous use of poets, film-makers, writers, and artists from the ‘margins’ as raw material for theoretical acrobatics can so often be further marginalisation” (Puwar 2003: 35). Thus, which spaces so extensively become available to transnational framing, and to sustained scholarly inquiry more generally, and which ones less readily so, is distributed along racialised lines. My choice of case to place this thesis’ theoretical considerations into dialogue with, of course, relies on precisely this problematic availability to scholarly inquiry and mediated representation – and the wealth of material it has produced. Thus, while my project is invested in critiquing modes of

knowledge production that all too easily attach to racialised bodies, neither I nor my work can claim to inhabit a space “beyond or outside, the fantasy of a position insulated from what it criticises” (Grosz 1995: 62). Grosz notes that this complicity is inherent in any critical project, that it cannot be evaded or corrected as even critical work reproduces the power of what it critiques in its own ways (1995: 62). I return to this point in my engagement with the limitations of this thesis in chapter eight.

### **Caught between two cultures?**

Popular culture, media discourse as well as academic work have at times represented British South Asians as caught between two cultures. Fiction and film (Gopinath 2005b; Lau 2003), media representations of British Asians (Saha 2012; Pichler 2007), scholarly “victimology” (Huq 2003), or the demonisation of British Muslims<sup>4</sup> (Bhattacharyya 2008; Puar and Rai 2004; Alexander 2000a, 2000b) in the wake of the war on terror<sup>5</sup> are examples that have to varying degrees fed into narratives of this kind. This section turns to popular culture to illustrate such a reading. The potential range of works to draw on to illustrate instances where British Asians have been represented as

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<sup>4</sup> In its analysis of UK print media, for instance, a report by the Greater London Authority (2007) finds that 91% of the instances where Islam and Muslims were covered were negative in their associations.

<sup>5</sup> The war on terror here refers to the post 9/11 (and 7/7) political climate that Puar (2005: 121) characterises as “an assemblage hooked into an array of enduring modernist paradigms (civilizing teleologies, orientalism, xenophobia, militarization, border anxieties) and postmodernist eruptions (suicide bombers, biometric surveillance strategies, emergent corporealities, counterterrorism gone overboard).”

caught between cultures is multifarious. The usual suspects that come to mind might include 1999 comedy-drama *East Is East* written by Ayub Khan-Din and directed by Damien O'Donnell, Gurinder Chadha's 2002 blockbuster *Bend it like Beckham*, or more recently, Menhaj Huda's 2011 coming-of-age drama *Everywhere and Nowhere*, all centred on the identity struggles of their protagonists between what is portrayed as British (read Western and liberal) values and Asian values that are represented as restrictive and often attached to a conservative family or patriarch. Here and in chapter six, I focus on two productions by the British public service network Channel 4: *Second Generation* (Sen 2003) and *Britz* (Kosminsky 2007), both two-part mini-series consisting of two feature-length episodes each<sup>6</sup>. While self-funded, i.e. relying on advertising rather than TV license revenue, Channel 4 is subject to a public service remit that specifies the kinds of services the network is required to provide British society with (cf. Houses of Parliament 2003, 2010).

The short introductory reading of *Britz* and *Second Generation* I provide here focuses on the ways in which both dramas feed into narratives that represent British Asians as defined by an angst-ridden struggle between Asian cultural attachments and British aspirations and lifestyles. Situated at the opposite end of the spectrum of critiques that caution against the misplaced celebration of hybridity (cf. Hutnyk 2005; Puwar 2003; Spivak 1999; Grewal and

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 1 for a brief synopsis of both dramas.

Kaplan 1994; Chow 1993) and against transnational space as virtually dissolving into utter fluidity (cf. Pratt and Yeoh 2003; Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Kaplan 1987), I read the representation of post-migrant in-betweenness as predominantly defined by a clash of cultures as similarly problematic. Both dramas will later be subjected to a more extensive, queer intersectional reading in chapter six. While differing in focus, these two readings are by no means mutually exclusive, but show what a queer intersectional lens might add to the frame in terms of how transnational subjects are approached. Complementing this reading of *Britz* and *Second Generation* that excavates ways in which the dramas are complicit with the caught between cultures paradigm with a more reparative viewing/reading practice (Sedgwick 2003) in chapter six allows for an illustration of how a queer intersectional lens might challenge the all too familiar. This juxtaposition also provides an entry point to the case study that flags this thesis' concerns with ways of thinking about and producing knowledge on subjects marked with difference, respectively with how such markers of difference risk being produced and reified in cultural and scholarly representation.

Particularly, post-migrant<sup>7</sup> generations have been constructed and represented as caught between two cultures and struggling to break free from

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<sup>7</sup> The notion of “post-migrant” was coined in relation to European theatre and art projects, for example the Ballhaus Naunynstrasse Theatre in Berlin (see <http://www.ballhausnaunynstrasse.de/>) or the Europe Now project (see <http://europenowblog.org/>). It denotes a shift from hegemonic cultural productions to the inclusion of artists who draw on a migration background as cultural capital in their perspectives. My use of term post-migrant throughout this thesis is not limited to a

constraining traditions, haunted by what Alexander has called the “spectre of ‘the between’”:

The spectre of ‘the between’ continues to haunt accounts of Asian youth identities, even into the twenty-first century, providing a convenient explanation for everything from marriage partners and consumption patterns to religious practices, and from educational under-achievement and unemployment to crime and violence. (Alexander 2006: 271)

*Second Generation* and *Britz* each nurture this spectre in their own ways.

At the outset of *Second Generation* its female protagonist Heere is introduced as an independent young British Asian woman who has been estranged from her Indian family for nine years, following her choice of living with her white British fiancé Jack, a music journalist. *Second Generation* turns the trope of breaking free from tradition on its head and begins when Heere’s father is gravely ill and her sisters, Pria and Rina, urge her to confront the struggles she had escaped by opting out, so to speak, and stop “trying to pretend her heritage doesn’t matter” (Asians in Media 2003). The main plotline of the drama then revolves around Heere’s romantic life pivoting between Jack and the rekindled romantic tension between her and her (British Asian) boyfriend from times past. While there are numerous other instances through which

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temporal after-the-fact of migration. It designates, on the one hand, what has been called the second- and subsequent generations of “migrants” who have not migrated. On the other, it resonates with the meanings post-migrant theatre has infused it with in challenging orientalist othering and addressing questions around identity and ethnicity in contemporary European societies. Recent academic work that has adopted the term include the conference ‘New Post-Migrant Socialities: Rethinking Urban Leisure Publics in the Context of Diversity and Dominance’, held in January 2013 at the Goethe University in Frankfurt (see <http://www.migrant-socialities.de/conferences/conference/>), and the research seminar “The Post-migrant in Arts and Culture” (see <http://migrationandculture.ku.dk/postmigrant/>) held in April 2013 at the University of Copenhagen. Interestingly, Kaur and Kalra (1996), writing on music and British Asian identities already used the term post-migrant descriptively to denote the British Asian context, yet left it untheorised.

representations of being caught between two cultures could be queried, for instance the obligatory family function where Heere and Jack's presence is met with disapproval and downright rejection, it is Heere's relationship with the men in her life I focus on here: her fiancé Jack, rivalling love interest Sam, and her father (only ever referred to as Mr. Sharma). Jack and Sam fight for/about her as much as she struggles between them – and it is this relationship triangle, as well as Heere's fraught relationship with her ailing father, that carry the notion of being caught between two cultures in *Second Generation*.

In a quarrel with Jack during a club night they attend together, Heere mimics an Indian dance performance that is taking place on stage and turns to Jack, asking him "do I fit in now"? She simultaneously seems to vent her anger at her family, her frustration about being at the club with Jack, as well as her visible annoyance with being placed in the ethnic camp – not only by her surroundings at the club, but also through Jack's professional involvement with the British Asian music scene as a journalist. This brief scene early on in the drama sets the point of departure for Heere's journey: at Jack's side, disidentifying with Asian culture, angry, and reluctant to be ascribed Asianness by white British people as well as by her family. Heere and Jack's relationship becomes increasingly overshadowed by Heere's re-awakened feelings for Sam, whom she had not seen for years since their previous relationship had

ended, and who she incidentally bumps into at the club that very same night. Both Sam and Mr. Sharma, respectively the complicated and shifting relationships Heere entertains with them, stand in for her (reluctant) attachments to and struggles with/against Asianness, while Jack represents her British identification and lifestyle choices. The parallel storyline of Mr. Sharma, and the tragedy surrounding the untimely death of Heere's mother Sonali, is told by the means of nostalgic flashbacks to India. As the plot develops and Mr. Sharma's mental health deteriorates, he increasingly conflates Heere and Sonali in hallucinations. These blurry, dream-like nostalgic sequences, as well as her quest to catch up with and understand the (to her) missing pieces of her past, situate Heere ever more within her Asian heritage. To Mr. Sharma, as to the spectator, Heere visually becomes one with Sonali, and thus with a temporally as well as spatially remote India.

When Heere ultimately leaves Jack – not primarily for Sam, but because he was reluctant to accommodate Mr. Sharma in their home – she relates her decision to him by telling him “You shouldn’t have made me choose Jack, between you and Dad (...) I can’t be just yours, it doesn’t work”. In the end, Heere thus first and foremost chooses her father, the ghost of her mother, her past, Asia. She smuggles Mr. Sharma out of the hospital’s psych ward where her sisters had him committed, and takes him to Kolkata, where the two of them find closure over the death of her mother Sonali. Before leaving

for India, Heere tells Sam that she loves him, yet bids him goodbye at the same time. Her departure and farewell to Sam coincide with a Holi party at the club. Their exchange of Holi greetings, and mutual sprinkling of coloured powder (a Holi tradition), is portrayed as a rather spiritual moment between the two. This scene stands in stark contrast to the one I have opened this brief reading with. While taking place in the very same location where Heere mocked her Indian heritage in annoyance and thus delineated herself from her Asianness, this latter scene represents her embrace of her Asianness. It thus foreshadows how *Second Generation* resolves the notion of being caught between two cultures in its plot narrative. Rather than subscribing to the simplistic trope by which the protagonists break free from tradition, from the confines of their Asian families, to strive, *Second Generation* culminates in Heere choosing her father, choosing Sam over Jack, and choosing Kolkata over London. The representation of post-migrant struggle between cultures, however, remains intact through/despite the reversal of outcomes. *Second Generation* arguably suggests, then, that said struggle can only be overcome by choosing one identity over the other, and thus Heere chooses Asianness over Britishness in the end. This either/or binary narrative is a position *Second Generation* shares with *Britz*, as I show below. In a serene setting on the steps of the Ganges in Kolkata, leading up to the finale of the drama, Heere and her father are shown performing a memorial ceremony for Sonali. All struggles seem resolved when he confesses for the first time that Sonali had committed

suicide, and Heere in turn concedes "I know". Behind them on the steps, sits Sam, ready to embark on a new life with Heere and Mr. Sharma in Kolkata. In the closing scene, overlooking the city from the rooftops, Heere notes that "it's not London!" and Sam affectionately replies "no, it's incredible (...) we could have something really wonderful here!". Heere's choice of Asianness through her reconciliation with her father joins forces with Sam's choice of a life with Heere that includes her father. It is thus the very life Jack had refused, and with Mr. Sharma's acceptance of Sam as Heere's partner, grants the acceptance that he in turn had refused Jack.

*Britz*, on the other hand, draws less on romanticised notions of here and there but evokes post- 9/11 and 7/7 narratives that provide fodder for the spectre of the between by portraying British Asian Muslims primarily as a potential threat to society and as terrorists. The plot revolves around the siblings Sohail and Nasima Wahid – Sohail who drops out of university to join MI5 in the fight against terrorism, and his sister Nasima who turns to a jihadist group after becoming increasingly alienated by the treatment of British Muslims in society. *Britz* recounts the same story twice, in the first episode from Sohail's perspective as an intelligence officer required (and reluctantly willing) to spy on his former friends and neighbours in Bradford, and in the second episode from Nasima's deeply disillusioned perspective that leads her to train as a suicide bomber. Like *Second Generation*, *Britz* by no means conveys a

straightforward narrative that culminates in the protagonists' breaking free from tradition. On the contrary, it weaves in a strong critique of British anti-terrorism legislation. It furthermore problematises the racial profiling of British Muslims by government agencies, as well as harsh anti-terror measures, such as the control order<sup>8</sup> that is to become a central plot element, as a cause for radicalisation. *Britz* nevertheless serves as an example for the caught-between-two-cultures paradigm. It does so not only in the ways in which the incompatibility of British and Asian (in this case read Muslim) values is foregrounded by the differing paths the protagonists take, but additionally by reducing the representation of British Muslims to "beards, scarves, halal meat, terrorists, [and] forced marriage" (Saha 2012). Additionally a look at Channel 4's advertisement of *Britz* proves revealing:

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<sup>8</sup> Control orders were a British piece of legislation under the 2005 Prevention of Terrorism Act that gave the Home Secretary the power to considerably restrict an individual's liberties on "reasonable grounds for suspecting that the individual is or has been involved in terrorism-related activity". The stated purpose of control orders was to protect "members of the public from a risk of terrorism" (Houses of Parliament 2005). The suspect's rights of appeal were extremely limited and no double jeopardy restrictions applied. Permissible restrictions include (but are not limited to) "wearing an electronic tag, refraining from contact with specified individuals or movement outside a demarcated area, being subject to curfews, house arrest, having no access to communications, [and] state personnel having access to the person's residence at any time" (Moran 2006). From January 2012 control orders were replaced by the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act (Houses of Parliament 2011) which allows for "fewer controls but greater surveillance" (Casciani 2012), a move that has been qualified as a mere rebranding of control orders (Ryder 2011).



Figure 1 - *Britz* advertisement, Channel 4<sup>9</sup>

The rather striking visual shows Sohail and Nasima's portraits in front of a burning British flag. Sohail, wearing his MI5 staff badge, defiantly looks into the camera, while Nasima, slightly set back, looks troubled and lowers her gaze. The Union Jack, perfectly visible on the left hand side, stands in binary opposition to the flames on the right. The strapline used to market *Britz* "Whose Side Are You On?" boldly marks the premises of the drama from the outset: there are indeed sides to take, and they don't leave much room for negotiation. While both episodes engender empathy and understanding for the respective protagonist and his/her motives, the finale leaves little room for ambiguity and makes ever clearer how *Britz* represents British Muslims. Not only are Sohail and Nasima both in their own way caught between their Britishness and their Asianness, the only way to resolve this struggle, *Britz* seems to suggest, is to choose a side. In Nasima's case, that turns out to be to pull the

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<sup>9</sup> Advert copyright by 4creative, used here under the fair dealing exception of criticism and review.

trigger causing her suicide vest to explode, killing her and Sohail along with the “targets” gathered on the public square that is the setting for the finale.

The plot narrative in both episodes carefully traces the complex, shifting, and conflicting discursive structures Nasima as well as Sohail are situated within. Sohail embarks on his trajectory as unflinching patriot with a vocation to serve law and order, and is gradually portrayed as more reflexive – through his own experience, as much as in dialogue with his sister. This reflexivity is partially conveyed through Sohail’s sneaking realisation that his recruitment to MI5 may have been based on the very same kinds of racial profiling (young, brown, Muslim) his targets are subject to. Nasima’s story thematises a similar shift when her strong belief in grassroots politics, protests and student organising are shaken to the core by the helplessness in the face of the British anti-terror apparatus that she experiences when her best friend is subject to a control order and ultimately driven to suicide. The ending of the drama, however, forecloses the potential for ambiguity and nuance the plot narrative(s) harbour. The very final scene, following the bomb’s detonation, shows Nasima in a pre-recorded video justifying her actions and implicating British society in her choices:

you are not innocent, ok (...) while you keep electing this government, while you sit on your hands and do nothing while they pass these laws that you know are wrong while you look away as they butcher innocent Muslims (...) and you do nothing. You are not innocent and you will remain our target, till the last drop of our blood, so help me God.

Despite the potential to tell a different story, and contra moments of nuanced analysis and critique throughout the film, *Britz* thus ends by feeding into stereotypical portrayals of British Muslims as a danger to society – Nasima's suicide mission succeeds, and her video message indeed re-inscribes the representation of Muslims as terrorists, of British Muslim youth as easily radicalised – which in turn re-enforces the notion of British Asians as caught between two cultures, here in its fear-mongering capacity of home-grown terrorism discourse.

Both Channel 4 dramas thus represent the post-migrant identities of their protagonists as defined by conflicting binaries such as Asian/British or here/there. The ways in which these conflicts and struggles are carried out imply an essential underlying either/or binary, foreclosing any possibility of both/and. This discourse of binary oppositions and identity conflict "freezes the South Asian other without political or social agency or the room to negotiate subjectivity. The South Asian other is thus the object, not the subject, of her own cultural identity" (Puar 1996: 130). I do not wish to argue that, empirically, no instances of struggle between conflicting cultural backgrounds occur in transnational spaces (or elsewhere for that matter). Such instances of struggle have, however, been generalised, have become tropes, have taken on commonsensical meaning and are widely represented as defining (and constraining) British Asian subjects. The reading of *Britz* and *Second Generation*

this section has provided serves to illustrate the modes of representation that such a caught-between-cultures paradigm engenders. Not only does the evidence not support any generalised notion of being caught between two cultures, the figure of the post-migrant as disoriented and confused relies on static assumptions of two essential cultures to be caught between (Brah 1996: 40-42). Post-migrant generations are “constantly imagined and re-imagined from moment to moment, person to group, and from one ‘second generation’ to the ‘next (second) generation’” (Alexander 2006: 271). They may sometimes draw on, sometimes challenge and sometimes subvert what Asian, British or British Asian may mean.

### **Intersectionally transnational**

The notion of transnational social space has emerged from the study of transnational migration, where the simultaneous links and attachments to migrants' countries of origin and residence (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, 1995; Glick Schiller 1997; Vertovec 1999; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) were foregrounded. The dichotomies of immigrant or emigrant, origin and destination conjured up by mainstream migration scholarship appear inadequate in a world where migration is increasingly characterised by simultaneity. As a consequence, transnationalism in migration studies has been conceptualised

as the emergence of new social spaces that transcend notions of unidirectional permanent migration with assimilation as its likely outcome. Transnational migration scholarship has shifted the attention to the simultaneous attachment and identification with more than one place (Vertovec 2009; Glick Schiller et al. 1992). Due to those dual attachments transnational migrants have been found to develop what Vertovec has coined as transnational “bifocality”, where both of the places that migration scholarship frequently thinks of as migrant “sending” and “receiving” countries, “are constantly monitored and perceived as complementary aspects of a single space of experience” (Vertovec 2004: 975). The main focus of transnational migration scholarship has been on the economic and political implications of transnational migration for states (Bauböck 2003), the networks through which economic, political, cultural and social capital is organised (cf. Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Faist 1998; Guarnizo 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003) and the impact of transnational bifocality on migrants’ practices (cf. Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Goldring 2002; Pessar and Mahler 2003; Vertovec 2003; Itzigsohn and Villacrés 2008). How subjects become in, of and through transnational spaces and further constitute them has received somewhat less attention. The figure of the “transmigrant”, a term coined by Glick-Schiller (1995), as well as other inhabitants of transnational spaces, have remained curiously silent in such work on migrant transnationalism.

Some have called for a sounder empirical delimitation of transnationalism and definition of the relevant units of analysis and measurement (Guanzino and Smith 1998; Mahler 1998; Portes et al. 1999; Pries 2008; Khagram and Levitt 2008). For the purposes of this project, however, instead of further operationalising the transnational space, I follow Jackson and colleagues in broadening rather than delimiting the scope of knowledge production on the transnational space to go “beyond the confines of still-bounded-but-displaced ‘ethnic communities’ to encompass a more multidimensional, materially heterogeneous social field, characterized by multiple inhabitations and disjunctions” (Jackson et al. 2004: 15). As part I of this thesis unfolds, it will become clear that its engagement with material-discursive transnational becomings, as well as the work that the queering of intersectionality does, would sit oddly with a narrow definition of the transnational space. Opening the transnational space up – as Jackson et al. (2004) as well as other scholars that chapter three aligns its discussion of the transnational space with suggest – rather than narrowly defining it allows for conceptualisations beyond bifocal negotiations between a home- and a host-society but accounts for the heterogeneity of relations and experiences within a transnational space as well as its porous boundaries. As not everyone who takes part in transnational spaces is a migrant, and not all migrants lead transnational lives, this move decouples the transnational space from the act of migration as such. It extends the transnational space to people from diverse backgrounds, for instance (but not limited

to) post-migrants. Shifting the focus to the spaces transnationality takes place in, rather than normatively defined ethnic communities thus allows explorations of heterogeneity in terms of multiple experiences, practices and discursive formations taking place within transnational spaces.

Drawing on intersectional theory in gender studies to look at transnational becomings allows for an analysis of transnational subjects that pays close attention to the contextual multiplicity that a critique of the caught-between-two-cultures paradigm as well as a broad and heterogeneous conceptualisation of transnational spaces hint at. Not only transnationality, but discourses and practices around gender, race, class, or sexualities, for instance, play into the becoming of transnational subjects. Intersectionality, particularly when queered, has the potential of pushing scholarly representation to take into account the messiness that Villa attests human beings when she points out how, compared with any discursive order, “real-life persons are – a mess: untidy, complex, fuzzy, multi-layered, dynamic” (2011: 173). Purkayastha highlights the need for *transnationally intersectional* analyses if intersectionality is to retain its analytical power in an increasingly networked world “where within-country and between-country structures shape people’s experiences” (2012: 59). This thesis in turn argues for an *intersectionally transnational* approach to transnational becomings. Intersectionality has been lauded as gender studies’ most important theoretical contribution (McCall 2005)

and as paradigmatic in gender and queer studies (Winker and Degele 2011).

In conversation with intersectionality, conceptualised in summary as a set of theoretical and methodological tools to explore how markers of difference, power relations, normativities, and discursive formations are intertwined and act through one another to produce different kinds of subjects and in/exclusions, I hope to expand the conversation about modes by which knowledge on transnational subjects can be produced.

### **Queerly intersectional**

Intersectional theory (e.g. Lutz et al. 2011; Yuval Davis 2006; McCall 2005; Hill Collins 1998; Crenshaw 1991, 1989) draws attention to the ways in which so-called axes of difference intersect, and impact differently on the experience of, for instance, a lesbian migrant woman of colour compared to, perhaps, a straight man of the same ethnic background. I suggest that transnationality might be considered an additional category of analysis in research interested in transnational subjects. Applying an intersectional analysis to transnational becomings works towards broadening the scope to consider the ways in which transnationality intersects with other markers of differentiation. While for introductory purposes this section focuses predominantly on the queering move on intersectionality that this thesis proposes, chapter four

will explore in depth how an intersectional approach to transnational becomings alone risks falling short.

Feminist interventions into migration scholarship (cf. Curran et al. 2006; Donato et al. 2006; Boyd and Grieco 2003; Pessar and Mahler 2003; Pratt and Yeoh 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Morokvašić 1984) have shown how gender is relevant to all processes related to migration and, as a consequence, gender-aware transnational analyses have become increasingly widespread. However, the emphasis has rarely been on how gender impacts on the production of the transnational subject, or transnationality on the gendered subject. Rather, research has been disaggregated by gender as a binary variable with the attributes male and female. The same feminist accounts that have successfully brought gendered analyses to migration scholarship sometimes fail to address the underlying heteronormative assumptions (Luibhéid 2004). Itself a critical intervention, feminist work on migration may seem to offer a fruitful setting to (intersectionally) explore the role of sexualities and normativities in transnational spaces. Perhaps surprisingly, however, sexuality is too readily conflated with gender, and gender “in turn is often conflated with women — a triple erasure meaning that only women have sexuality, sexuality is gender, and gender or sexuality is normatively heterosexual” (Luibhéid 2004: 227). In queer migration scholarship, on the other hand, sexualities are at the forefront of research interests. Even though the focus of much research

has, perhaps understandably, remained on non-heterosexual subjects engaging in cross-border mobility, queer migrations scholars argue that queer methodologies do not need to be limited to the study of queer subjects (e.g. Luibhéid 2008a, 2008b; Manalansan IV 2006). They can be used as an instrument to explore how heteronormativity plays a role in producing not only those constructed as queer but also others who become normalised by the very same discourses. Heteronormativity not only imposes normative sexual identity and sexual practice, but also normative ways of life and legitimate forms of relationships (Jackson 2006). In Butler's words, it "renders the social field intelligible and normalizes that field for us" (2004: 42), and thus defines what is and is not socially acceptable and intelligible for/to everyone. Transnational, feminist, as well as queer migration scholarship can be read as critical interventions into migration studies that complicate the field by shifting the focus to simultaneity, continuity, and the production of particular subjects. They all are invested in comparable moves away from theorising migration as rational choice within push and pull frameworks and models of assimilation towards more complex conceptualisations (Luibhéid 2008a). Luibhéid (2008a: 173) furthermore argues that overlapping histories of imperialism, economies, and politics form the basis of queer migratory movements as well as transnational circuits – to which I might add that feminist migration scholars have pointed to related dynamics regarding gender and migration. While these critiques thus provide similar interventions – ones that in turn to some extent mirror

intersectional interventions into the field of gender studies – they have often evolved separately rather than in conversation.

While certainly not the only possible entry point, it is the scholarship on queer migrations that I read as an invitation to complicate heteronormative assumptions underlying much theorising and research on gender and transnational space. From the margins of migration studies, then, queer migrations serve as a kind of focal point from which to re-examine knowledge productions on transnational becomings. This thesis takes the call for the queering of social research beyond the immediate critical interventions on behalf of queer (migrant) subjects seriously, and places it in dialogue with the becoming of transnational subjects by ways of queering intersectionality.

Queer theory is crucial to this project not least because it is not limited to the study of non-heterosexual lives, but critically investigates how (hetero- and other) normativities are deployed. In Oswin's words,

Once we dismiss the presumption that queer theory offers only a focus on 'queer' lives and an abstract critique of the heterosexualization of space, we can utilize it to deconstruct the hetero/homo binary and examine sexuality's deployments in concert with racialized, classed and gendered processes. (Oswin 2008: 100).

"Queer" is commonly used (and gets crowd-defined, see f. ex. the Wikipedia entry on queer) as a catch-all phrase for various sexualities and gender identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender reminiscent of

the identity categorical approaches this thesis challenges. At its roots, however, lies a productive critique of such identity categories. I thus use queer in its questioning and critical incarnation as disruptive of normativities and binary thinking (Sedgwick 1990; Butler 1993). In this understanding, queer unpacks and challenges binary divisions such as male/female, hetero/homo, nature/culture, or more to the point of this thesis, here/there, material/discursive, home/host society or British/Asian. This means that queer is not understood as an additional category to be analysed intersectionally alongside others, but expresses the impossibility to encompass contextual, multiple and shifting material-discursive practices in static identity-categories. Therefore, rather than attributing queer to spaces, subjects or methods as a quality or characteristic, I use it as a verb, *queering*, in its active connotation as critical intervention into knowledge productions – one that challenges normativities and binary thinking.

The queering of intersectionality decentres the analysis, shifts it away from expected/pre-defined axes of differentiation, and allows for an approach to transnational becomings that mitigates against some of the pitfalls intersectionality (unqueered) harbours. It, for instance, addresses the problem of conflation of identity categories with categories of analysis that chapter four discusses in detail. Whether one adheres to the “holy trinity” of gender, race, and class (Grewal and Kaplan 1994), or further extends the list of intersections to

consider, normative lists of categories deemed to matter always already presuppose what might be found in a transnational space (or elsewhere). On the one hand such lists run counter the original critique of unidirectional and additive approaches at the heart of intersectional theory (Crenshaw 1989). On the other, they virtually prescribe what differences become available as subjects/objects of study. They limit who becomes “eligible” for intersectional analysis to, as Barad (2001: 98) has pointed out, “specifically marked bodies”. Queering intersectionality, in short, helps shift the focus from identity categories to the entangled nature of transnational subjects, including but not limited to the heteronormative discourses underlying transnational becomings as well as the modes of knowledge production operating in/on transnational spaces.

### **Thinking methodology through postdisciplinarity**

Amongst my fellow PhD researchers at the interdisciplinary LSE Gender Institute, no eyebrows are raised at work that does not quite fit narrowly defined disciplines nor follows a standard format of a social scientific PhD research report. It is a small community of scholars from diverse backgrounds that takes kindly to grappling with cross-disciplinary projects and the anxieties around methodological questions such work entails. Outside of the bubbles

ble, amongst the wider PhD community at LSE and beyond, however, the question of methodology can be a daunting one. When asked, “so, what is your PhD about?”, the anticipated answer follows the template of /discipline /problem /research question /methodology, from the third year of study onwards to be complemented by /findings, all preferably condensed into the infamous lift-blurb. While much is to be said for the latter in terms of self-marketing and academic networking, it is the format and content of the former that turns into the proverbial banana skin for cross-disciplinary or otherwise unconventional projects.

Outside of academic circles, the question usually remains on a conversational “so what do you do for a living?” level that does not require in-depth intellectual engagement to produce a satisfactory response. A simple “I’m working on a PhD in Gender Studies” suffices, one should think. Far from it, as that response more often than not is met with the choice of a genuinely interested “Oh, what exactly are General Studies?” or an awkward “well, that sounds interesting...”. Such casual acquaintances can relatively easily be satisfied by sidestepping the disciplinary and methodological implications of the question with a more readily intelligible “I’m a student”, “I’m a teacher”, or even “I’m doing a PhD in Sociology/Anthropology/[insert random reasonably well known discipline here]. This chapter, of course, requires a more serious engagement with the methodological underpinnings of my research than the-

se anecdotal snippets of conversation can provide. The difficulties and anxieties involved in answering a seemingly straightforward question about an important part of my life as a PhD researcher – the PhD research – are symptomatic of deeper ranging issues around disciplinary belonging, knowledge production and positionality. Where do I situate a project that does not neatly fit disciplinary boundaries? How do I position myself as a PhD researcher with a multi-disciplinary academic background? How do I make a predominantly conceptual thesis with an illustrative case study intelligible to peers to whom PhD thesis (to exaggerate crudely) equals social scientific research report? Indeed, what is the methodology, respectively how does one describe the methodology of such an endeavour? In the absence of a conventional methodology chapter, in this section I think about how to negotiate such questions in relation to my research and situate it as a postdisciplinary project.

Poststructural critiques of grand narratives, received paradigms and expert knowledges, in concert with feminist, postcolonial and queer challenges to ontological and epistemological orthodoxies and methodologies, testify to an increasing unease with pure disciplines. Much of the scholarship influential to my own work is produced by theorists without a clear-cut disciplinary identity. I am thinking here of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti or Karen Barad, whose work is not only influential

across and between many disciplines, but is not easily situated as belonging to/within any particular one. I am further thinking of the feminist scholarship I engage with in my discussion of intersectionality, and the queer theorists I put intersectionality into dialogue with in chapter three.

Disciplinary approaches – be it the classical disciplines of philosophy, law, medicine and theology, or more recent social scientific additions – come with particular kinds of knowledges and methodologies attached. Foucault (2003: 38) points out that “[d]isciplines in fact have their own discourse” and are “extraordinarily inventive when it comes to creating apparatuses to shape knowledge and expertise”. These apparatuses work by the means of a “code of normalisation” to reproduce themselves and to maintain boundaries around what does and does not count as proper knowledge. From such a perspective, of course, disciplines are not innocent divisors in the landscapes of knowledge production, but “come to represent power relations rather than rational cuts in the body of knowledge” (Lykke 2010: 20). Foucault goes on to argue that the “struggle against disciplines, or rather against disciplinary power” has to be an anti-disciplinary endeavour (2003: 40). As Gregson (2003: 6) aptly notes,

[i]n a world that refuses to recognize, let alone correspond to, disciplinary boundaries, where what matters in research practice is issues, connections, following things through, a singular disciplinary map is a poor map indeed to make sense of the world.

Interdisciplinarity is often used as an umbrella term for various modes of working across disciplines (Lykke 2010: 27) – note for instance my own use of the term at the outset of this section in referring to an academic department as interdisciplinary. Or, think of an edited volume like *Beyond Methodological Nationalism: Research Methodologies for Cross-Border Studies* (Amelina et al. 2012), a few chapters of which I draw on throughout my engagement with the transnational space. While the collection frames itself as interdisciplinary, and seeks to promote dialogue between sociology, history, and social anthropology on the common denominator “cross-border studies” (2012: 1), the contributions from various fields then stand alongside each other, leaving the reader to *do* interdisciplinarity for themselves. At the same time, if embodied in one scholar rather than in a department, edited collection, or other group of people, interdisciplinarity implies a rootedness in at least two disciplines to allow “synergies and transversal cross-disciplinary dialogues to emerge between heterogeneous fields of theory and methodology” (Lykke 2010: 27). The caveat in claiming interdisciplinarity as a PhD researcher seems thus obvious, particularly if, as in my own case, the academic trajectory to date has not taken place firmly rooted in any one discipline: “If the danger of disciplinarity resides in potential overspecialization, the danger of interdisciplinarity rests in potential superficiality. Disciplinarity offers depth but also insularity; interdisciplinarity offers scope but also rootlessness” (Stanford Friedman 1998: 312). Particularly in critical engagement with disciplinary literatures, this

rootlessness, not feeling fully at home in any canon, poses the danger of missing out, accompanied by a sense of academic inadequacy – impostor feelings (Langford and Clance 1993) appear as good as given. In addition, attempts to situate myself as an interdisciplinary scholar seem to invariably lead to questions around my previous degrees – surely, I must have had a disciplinary affiliation in the past that I can fall back on to remain intelligible. Similar difficulties have been noted by Vasterling *et al.* (2006: 67-68) in their discussion of gender studies as an interdisciplinary practice. While a majority of participants in their project (to develop an interdisciplinary curriculum) had a disciplinary background to embark on the project from, one scholar in particular, given her graduate studies in interdisciplinary women's studies, understood herself as interdisciplinary from the outset. Despite years spent in an interdisciplinary setting, as well as the explicitly interdisciplinary setting of the project, she repeatedly encountered that very same question about what her "proper" background was. While the scholar in question was able to, if reluctantly, claim affiliation to literary scholarship legitimated by her undergraduate degree, I run into trouble doing the same. What disciplinary affiliation does a BA in social work and social policy, which due to idiosyncrasies in the Swiss academic/educational landscape happened to foreground sociology and social research, with a minor in social anthropology, afford me? Or a taught master's degree in international development? While the latter might be the closest to disciplinarity I could feign, it is also the furthest removed from the

project at hand. My academic background to date might thus best be described as multidisciplinary, characterised by Lykke (2010: 26) as additive in that disciplinary canons were most certainly kept up. What both degrees combined have taught me, however, is that my academic interest in transnational spaces as well as in gender studies cross disciplinary boundaries. To situate my research as postdisciplinary instead, requires some further reflection on why such a move is necessary. The becoming of the transnational subject, as well as the transnational space it takes place in do not constitute new fields or new types of questions. On the contrary, the questions have been and continue to be posed within disciplinary boundaries as well as from a variety of cross-disciplinary perspectives. It is not the questions as such, but the approaches to answering them, the modes of producing knowledge about transnational subjects, including who does and does not count as transnational subject that I scrutinise.

The “post” in postdisciplinary does not refer to a temporal sequence in terms of something that comes after disciplines, that leaves disciplines behind in the past. Lykke defines postdisciplinarity as a critique of disciplinary boundaries, “a mode of organising knowledge production in ways that are different from the discipline-based structure of the modern university” (Lykke 2010: 28). How is such a postdisciplinary mode of knowledge production distinct? In that it does not attempt to be distinct, in that it neither follows

any one particular disciplinary canon nor adheres to any particular cross-disciplinary mode of theorising and researching in all that entails in terms of prior disciplinary groundings or ownership of questions.

Scholars from a variety of fields have identified the need for postdisciplinary approaches, and have further explored that idea in the study of tourism (Coles et al. 2006; 2009), design (Buscher and Cruickshank 2009; Wolmark and Gates-Stuart 2004), theatre (Case 2001), as well as in geography (Gregson 2003), feminist studies (Lykke 2010; Lazar 2007; Case 2001), political economy (Jessop and Sum 2001), sociology (Sayer 2001) and migration studies (Favell 2008). Postdisciplinarity challenges pure disciplines, “whose isolation and specialisation was formed in the enlightenment spirit of rational inquiry and the (social) engineering confidence of modernity” (Buscher and Cruickshank 2009: 2). It seeks to challenge modernist understandings of expert knowledges and manifests in an “increas[ed] interest in such issues and perspectives as the ‘situatedness’ of social science knowledge; post-colonialism as topic and method; and the challenges to received paradigms from ‘post-modernity’” (Jessop and Sum 2001: 89).

Postdisciplinary studies emerge when scholars forget about disciplines and whether ideas can be identified with any particular one; they identify with learning rather than with disciplines. They follow ideas and connections wherever they lead instead of following them only as far as the border of their discipline (Sayer 2001: 89).

Postdisciplinarity thus reclaims the “intellectual bricolage” that Stanford Friedman (1998: 312) critically warns against and that Mouzelis (1995: 53) derogatively refers to as “hotch-potch”<sup>10</sup>. Akin to Braidotti’s nomadic style (1994: 36-37), it posits practices of borrowing, adapting and re-purposing of theoretical concepts with little reverence for the disciplinary boundaries within which they have been coined. It is informed by an unease with the “conservatism, or its close cousin, methodism” at display where disciplines in crisis mode cling on to “illusions about the stability and boundedness of their objects” and attempt to “secure their boundaries, define an exclusive terrain of inquiry, and fix their object of study” (Brown 1997: 99). This very same conservatism is at work in claims that interdisciplinarity relies on sound disciplinary grounding to be considered viable as an approach (cf. Stanford Friedman 1998; Mouzelis 1995). In a call for “undisciplined” scholarship, Halberstam asks that such mastery is resisted and “counterintuitive modes of knowing” embraced (2011: 11).

The emphasis in Sayer’s definition (2001: 89) lies on pursuing connections wherever they may lead, rather than adhering to boundaries in theory and method set by disciplinary thinking. He argues against a conservatism

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<sup>10</sup> In response to what he alternately calls poststructuralist or postmodernist thinking, and as a striking example of disciplinary boundary marking, in this case around sociological theory, Mouzelis writes: “This rejection of boundaries, in combination with the neglect of micro, meso and macro levels of analysis, of social hierarchies, and of the agency-structure distinction, quite predictably leads to a hotch-potch that is neither good philosophy nor good literature, nor yet good sociology, psychoanalysis or semiotics. It is precisely this free-for-all strategy of dedifferentiation, and the abolition of distinctions and boundaries, that has led to the present incredible situation where anything goes, and where complex macro phenomena are reductively explained in terms of signs, texts, the unconscious or what have you.” (Mouzelis 1995: 53-54)

that requires prior disciplinarity to allow for interdisciplinary engagements, and notes that shifting the focus to allowing topics, problems or questions to take the lead, rather than a disciplinary canon, opens up space for thorough postdisciplinary modes of thinking and pursuing those questions. If the university is indeed a “rapidly disintegrating bandwagon of disciplines, sub-fields, and interdisciplines” that, as Halberstam goes on to suggest, has arrived at a crossroads where the choice is “between the university as corporation and investment opportunity and the university as a new kind of public sphere with a different investment in knowledge, in ideas, and in thought and politics” (2011: 8), then postdisciplinarity might be a tentative move towards the latter.

Case’s definition goes further in arguing that

‘postdisciplinarity’ retains nothing of the notion of a shared consciousness, or of a shared objective that brings together a broad range of discrete studies. Instead, it suggests that the organising structures of disciplines themselves will not hold. (...) Scholars do not work within fields, but at intersections of materials and theories. (2001: 150)

The stance I take for this project is, perhaps, a more cautious one. I remain unconvinced that the disciplinary structuring of the academic landscape will falter in the foreseeable future. Neither do I wish to deny the legitimacy of approaching a question from a purely disciplinary angle altogether, should such an angle be appropriate to the question at hand. However, many questions are situated at the intersections of disciplines, as Case points out. Yet

other questions, like the ones at the centre of this thesis, have been posed within disciplines, for instance the sociology of migration, but might be more adequately addressed by drawing on a wider range of theories. Pursuing the transnational subject shows that it is not only a matter of where (within which discipline) the questions are asked, but what questions can be asked within any given discipline – take for example the aforementioned silence on the transnational subject in transnational migration scholarship. As part I of this thesis seeks to show, putting scholarship on transnational migration into dialogue with, for instance, geography, gender studies and queer theory in a postdisciplinary manner opens up modes of approaching the transnational subject that otherwise remain closed off to either. While it is an expressed aim of this thesis to propose an approach to transnational becomings that is *less* partial than the modes of knowledge production it critiques, it can nevertheless only ever remain partial. Halberstam (2011) makes the case for embracing failure as a queering move against mastery and against full knowability, in other words, against disciplinary modes of knowledge production. A certain extent of failure may indeed be built-in to a postdisciplinary approach by design – not only the failure to fully know, but also the failure to fully move beyond disciplinary structures in current academic landscapes. Queering is thus not only substantively an integral part to this project, but by the means of postdisciplinarity also methodologically. Postdisciplinarily queering intersectionality, and by extension modes of producing knowledge on the transna-

tional space, queers disciplinarity and thus posits postdisciplinarity as a queering move in its own right.

Entering debates on where disciplines begin and end, whether gender studies (or indeed migration studies) is its own discipline or postdisciplinary in nature (e.g. Lykke 2010; Stanford Friedman 1998; Brown 1997), is beyond the scope of this thesis. The dialogue I wish to promote by reading, for instance, transnational migration literature, feminist intersectional theory, and queer theory through one another and by discussing this theoretical reading through an illustrative case study, does not adhere to disciplinary boundaries, nor is it interdisciplinarily grounded. Barad (2007: 71) uses the metaphor of diffraction “for describing the methodological approach (...) of reading insights through one another in attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations of difference and how they matter”. She emphasises that such methodologies are not only attentive to difference, but “highlight, exhibit, and make evident the entangled structure of the changing and contingent ontology of the world, including the ontology of knowing” (Barad 2007: 73). The following chapters begin with the transnational but soon move on to read transnational becomings otherwise, to read transnationality through other literatures. While partiality is indeed integral to a postdisciplinary project, my hope is that such a reading will contribute towards reducing partiality in instances where disciplinarity risks operating like blinders that

problematically mask some differences that matter, just to isolate and potentially over-emphasize others.

In a call for a postdisciplinary approach to migration studies, Favell (2008) extends the meaning of postdisciplinarity considerably. He does so by conceptualising methodological nationalism as a disciplinary problem of migration studies, one that has its roots in modernist definitions of migration, of states, and of the international system. Transnationalism, he argues, has questioned some of these definitions, but remains closely implicated in descriptions of migrants that not only take for granted what a migrant is, but also maintain a sole focus on binary interactions between sets of sending and receiving countries (Favell 2008: 269-270). My concerns around transnational bifocality closely echo Favell's, and addressing them postdisciplinarily by drawing on intersectionality and queer theory to challenge the ways in which transnational subjects are reduced to transnationality are the contribution this thesis makes to transnational migration studies. Favell consequently goes on to ask:

What might happen if we shut down the disciplinary canons for a moment, and reboot our computer? The filing system in the computer has collapsed and we are forced to redescribe our object of study out there in the real world. Nothing appears natural any more: certainly not our definition of what constitutes a migrant or an event/action of migration in the world. We would have to draw new lines and new conventions. (Favell 2008: 270)

In ever more complex configurations, rebooting has come to function as the tech-support panacea thought to fix anything that may or may not have gone amiss without so much as investigating the problem at hand. When the problem at hand, however, is not a glitch in a computer system but a complex question about the production of knowledge on the social world, rebooting as an analogy for a postdisciplinary approach is somewhat problematic. It implies a fresh start, a greenfield approach where no prior foundations and/or constraints require consideration, where in fact dismissing any previous goings-on seems to be the main objective. Similar to the ways in which postcoloniality relies on coloniality (Hesse and Sayyid 2006; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; McClintock 1995, 1992; Shohat 1992) and the postmodern condition cannot be thought of independently of modernity (Felski 1995), postdisciplinarity would be unintelligible without the notion of academic disciplines in the background. A reboot in the literal sense thus hardly seems an option. Instead, I shift the focus from “shut[ting] down the disciplinary canon” to the required re-description of “our object of study”. My work engages in such a re-description, for instance in being oriented around transnational becomings rather than transmigrants (Glick Schiller 1995), or in decoupling transnationality from migration. Re-description in itself, however, does not suffice. In “object-orienting” research, in other words, in re-orienting the modes by which knowledge on the object of study is produced, is where postdisciplinarity carries its weight. Once re-description — understood as a re-drawing of

boundaries around what is to be researched, Favell's drawing of "new lines and new conventions" — has taken place, it is necessary to maintain an orientation around that object of study. By that I mean an object-orientation that neither dismisses prior knowledge produced in disciplinary settings, nor adheres to the boundaries those disciplines have set, but challenges limitations of those knowledges that arise from disciplinary tunnel-vision while building on existing foundations.

Ahmed (2010: 235) points to two ways in which orientation matters, both of which resonate with this thesis. First literally, orientation is significant and important, and second, orientation "matters" in the sense that it materialises subjects and objects. Both senses of orientation resonate with this project in a number of ways. In terms of being oriented around an object of study is methodologically significant to my work because it determines (or undetermines?) how I do it. Orienting myself around an object of study rather than disciplinary belongings and boundaries matters. Orientation around transnational becomings as an object of study hints, perhaps, at my own (British Swiss) transnational background. It also raises important questions around how objects of study become available, and to whom: "Perception hence involves orientation; what is perceived depends on where we are located, which gives us a certain take on things. (...) I can perceive an object only insofar as my orientation allows me to see it" (Ahmed 2006: 27).

My persistent orientation around an object of study also materialises a thesis, and materialises me as a scholar and writer: “the writer ‘becomes’ a writer through writing” (Ahmed 2010: 246). A theorisation of transnational becomings thus matters, in both senses of the term. As chapter three explores, the orientation around this particular object of study leads me to consider transnational becomings not only as subject matter, so to speak, but also in terms of how the subject becomes matter, how subjects are material-discursively produced. The scholarly work I review in chapter five, where I turn to academic knowledges produced on the British Asian transnational space, has taken British Asians as its object of study, and thus contributed to the ways in which such subjects and spaces become available as objects of study to orient around. By extension then, the orientations of these scholars momentarily become the focus of mine. Such scholarly knowledges form part of the discourses that performatively produce what they name (Butler 1993: 2). The postdisciplinary orientation around an object of study does not hinge on an illusion of comprehensiveness or “god trick of seeing everything from nowhere” (Haraway 1988: 581). On the contrary, while both rigid disciplinary scholarship and an interdisciplinarity that relies on disciplinary grounding promote expert knowledges prone to the god trick, postdisciplinary knowledge production is situated and partial (Haraway 1988) in its refusal to adhere to disciplinary boundaries and normative methodologies. A postdisciplinary orientation around transnational becomings as an object of study is

neither a neat, nor a singular, nor straight-forward (linear) orientation. It is an unruly orientation, one that takes detours that move this project in queer directions: “To make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things” (Ahmed 2006: 161). As I hope this introductory chapter has shown, the order I wish to disturb not only refers to the ways in which knowledge on transnational becomings is produced and ordered, or to intersectional theory, but also to the normalising effects of academic discourses, of scholarly disciplines. My orientation around my object of study thus relies on dis-orientation (Ahmed 2006) and the queering potential of a postdisciplinary approach.

## **Chapter outline**

### *Part I*

Part I of this thesis is conceptually invested in reading the literature on transnational social spaces in transnational migration studies, poststructuralist and critical materialist insights on subject formation, intersectional approaches in gender studies and the queering of social research through one another. It thus engenders a dialogue between transnationalism, intersectionality and queer theory that, in an attempt at integrating these sets of literature, results in proposing a queer intersectional approach to the becoming of transnational subjects.

**Chapter 2** explores the kind of transnational social space this thesis' constructs as its field and thus sets the scene for further thinking about the becoming of transnational subjects. It aligns this thesis with a broad and open conceptualisation of the transnational space to take heterogeneity and multiplicity within into account, and decouples the transnational social space from the act of migration as such. The chapter furthermore delineates such an understanding of the transnational space from approaches that have tended to essentially transnationalise the subject through their strong focus on transnational bifocality, and thus risk re-inscribing methodological nationalism in transnational research. **Chapter 3** goes on to ask how one becomes a subject of/in/through a transnational social space. It draws on theories concerned with the discursive production of subjects, performativity, and critical materialism to argue for an understanding of transnational subjects as material-discursive becomings. The chapter then proposes an intersectional approach to transnational subjects, and argues that this move mitigates against the risk of essentially transnationalising subjects without in turn losing sight of the transnational in transnational becomings. **Chapter 4** concludes Part I of the thesis and draws on the preceding chapters as well as intersectional approaches in gender studies and queer theory. It argues that the queering of intersectionality provides a useful way to disrupt the reliance on binary variables of some transnational migration research towards an inclusive analysis

of the ways in which subjects negotiate the transnational social space and become subject in and through that space.

## *Part II*

In part II of the thesis, to illustrate, discuss and critically evaluate how a queer intersectional approach plays out in an empirical context, this emerging approach enters into dialogue with a case study on the British Asian transnational space. **Chapter 5** provides a rationale for this choice of case, and outlines the methods used in the case study. The chapter then engages with scholarly representations of British Asians, which simultaneously serves to introduce the case and to question the modes by which academic knowledge on it has at times been produced. **Chapter 6** returns to the Channel 4 dramas *Britz* and *Second Generation* and offers a more extensive reading based on a queered intersectionality discussed in Part I of the thesis. **Chapter 7** extends the queer intersectional case study to the Tumblr blog *Bhagyawati* produced within the British Asian transnational space. The chapter engages with the themes by which the blog curates and imagines transnational becomings and addresses questions around knowability which it then extrapolates from the blog to queer intersectional modes of knowledge production.

In conclusion, **chapter 8** draws the conceptual dialogue in Part I and insights from the illustrative case study in Part II back together. It sums up the (postdisciplinary) implications for gender and transnational migration

studies and highlights the ways in which this thesis and its queer intersectional approach to the becoming of transnational subjects seek to contribute across disciplines. It then engages with the limitations in scope and execution of this thesis and, finally, hints at potential ways to carry a queer intersectional approach forward/across to other spaces and subjects.

## Part I



## **Chapter Two: Constructing the Transnational Space**

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*“The constant and various flows of (...) goods and activities have embedded in them relationships between people” (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 11).*

In what may be termed the transition from the “age of migration” (Castles and Miller 2009) to the “age of transnationalism” (Glick Schiller et al. 1995: 59), the focus of migration studies has undergone a transnational turn and shifted from investigating migration as a linear process geared towards assimilation into the majority society of a so-called receiving country, to exploring migrant’s transnational practices and connections across borders, between their places of origin and residence. Earlier scholarship on transnational migration has subsequently emphasised transmigrants’ (Glick Schiller et al. 1995) maintainence of simultaneous links to two countries, cross-border networks and transnational practices, and methodological concerns about the operationalisation of transnationalism as a field of study and research para-

digm. This chapter first explores these literatures in terms of the kinds of knowledge on the becoming of transnational subjects they allow for and foreclose, to then position this thesis within more fluid theorisations of the transnational space.

The notion of transnational space this thesis takes as its starting point has emerged from the study of transnational migration and its definition remains contested terrain. Much of the literature<sup>1</sup> has emphasised simultaneous links between migrants' societies of origin and residence (cf. Vertovec 2009; Vertovec 2004; Faist 1998; Smart and Smart 1998; Glick Schiller et al. 1992), the political and social networks through which economic, cultural and social capital is organized and transformed (cf. Smith 2007; Kearney 2005; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Faist 2000; Faist 1998) and the impact of migrant transnationalism on nation-state and vice versa (cf. Kearney 2005; Glick Schiller and Fouron 1998). Early work within the transnational paradigm has often been more concerned with cross-border flows of people, goods and communications and with how transnational practices affect nation-states than with what a transnational space might do to their subjects and vice versa. While arguably omnipresent as an agent of transnationality, it is his/her transnational practices and cross-border connections that were of interest, more so than the

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<sup>1</sup> In my discussion of the transnational space in this chapter I prioritise scholarship that has contributed to theorising transnational migration, transnational spaces/practices, and transnational research over empirical work in migration studies that has subsequently employed a transnational lens.

ways in (and extent to) which transnationality is drawn on in becoming subject in/of/through the transnational social space. The transnational subject as such has thus remained somewhat opaque in the process.

While some scholars have argued for a sounder conceptualisation of the phenomenon (cf. Portes et al. 1999; Mahler 1998) and meticulous definition of the units of reference, analysis, and measurement for transnational migration research (Amelina and Faist 2012; Pries and Seeliger 2012; Pries 2008), I follow Jackson, Crang and Dwyer (2004) in their suggestion to extend rather than further delimit the scope of the transnational social space beyond normatively defined ethnic or national communities to encompass the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the entanglements encountered within such spaces. Pessar and Mahler (2003: 835-838) suggest that transnational research can benefit from leaving bi-local and comparative approaches behind in favour of a stronger focus on transnational social spaces as such. They suggest that valuable insights may be gained by focusing research attention on hegemonic as well as transgressive cultural constructs and the circumstances of their production and consumption. Based on the notion that not everyone who participates in transnational spaces is a migrant (Levitt 2011; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Jackson et al. 2004; Vertovec 2004; Mahler 1998; Brah 1996), and that not every migrant lives transnationally, such broad conceptualisations decouple the transnational social space from the act of migration as such and extend

it to people from diverse backgrounds, for example (but not limited to) subsequent post-migrant generations. While the becoming of transnational subjects, transnational becomings, and the knowledges produced about such becomings, rather than the transnational space as such is the object of study this thesis pursues, the space transnationality takes place in is understood as constitutive of as well as constituted by transnational subjects and their material-discursive practices. This chapter engages with the conceptual trajectory of transnational migration and the transnational social space not only to partially situate my work in conversation with that scholarship, but also to outline what notion of transnational space this thesis engages in further dialogue with intersectionality and queer theory. It aligns itself with understandings of transnational spaces that incorporate poststructural notions of fluidity and hybridity (as well as with their critique) to further think about how transnational subjects become in/of/through the space they create and inhabit. It thus provides the background against which to read the remainder of the thesis and maps out the transnational social space as a terrain for the becoming of the transnational subject by constructing it as its field.

## **The transnational turn**

Castles and Miller (2009) have referred to the current era as the “age of migration” not because migration is a new phenomenon (on the contrary) but they argue that contemporary migration is characterised by its globalisation (more countries affected); its acceleration (increased number of migrants); its differentiation (origin of migrants migrating to individual countries); its politicisation (domestic policy, bilateral and regional treaties and security policies are increasingly affected by perceived risks related to international migration); its feminisation (women’s quantitative and qualitative role in migration is more prominently recognised); and the proliferation of migration transition (lands of emigration transition into immigration lands) (Castles and Miller 2009: 10-12). These tendencies are accompanied by an increased academic interest in explaining causes and effects of a wide range of migratory movements and processes.

The paradigm shift to transnationalism this section outlines is not inherent in migration as such, or in the characteristics identified by Castles and Miller, but pertains to the ways in which migration and migrants are thought about in theory and research practice. Informed by modernist imagery of coherent national communities, the underlying assumption of classical theories of migration has been that migration is a linear trajectory, a singular movement from one nation-state to another, culminating in assimilation (e.g. Gor-

don 1964; Kazal 1995), absorption (e.g. Eisenstadt 1954) or integration into a majority society at the receiving end of the migratory process. Despite competing approaches, such as pluralism (e.g. Moynihan and Glazer 1963), that contested assimilationist ideologies and the underlying notion of a majority society to be assimilated or integrated into, migration theory's main interest remained in linear processes of migrants' integration into a "receiving" society: "migrants are held to move between distinct, spatially demarcated communities and, in the long run, to be capable of maintaining an involvement in only one of them" (Rouse 1991: 27).

Glick Schiller and colleagues introduced transnationalism as a critical intervention and as an alternative to competing theories of assimilation and pluralism within migration research (1992: 225). The underlying binarisms of immigrant/emigrant, origin/destination, sending/receiving countries as well as categories like permanent, temporary or return migration seem inadequate and of little analytical value in a world where migration is increasingly determined by simultaneity and circulation (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, 1995). Both, the notion of community that approaches to migration informed by modernisation theories were invested in, and the idea of a clear-cut centre/periphery divide that dependency and world-system theories conjured up are "unable to contain the postmodern complexities" (Rouse 1991: 28) that contemporary migratory trajectories pose. In the age of transnationalism, the

orderly cosiness “of coherent communities and consistent subjectivities, of dominant centres and distant margins no longer seems adequate” (Rouse 1991: 24). Transnationalism as an intervention in migration scholarship is thus a construct that helps theorise the trajectories, experiences, practices and identities of migrants who refuse to adhere to the linearity that theories of migration had previously imposed on them. A transnational approach to migration acknowledges that migrants may at the same time build ties to the societies they live in *and* maintain a range of meaningful connections to their societies of origin. Indeed, in Glick Schiller and colleagues’ seminal theorisation (1992; Basch et al. 1994), it is precisely this notion of entertaining simultaneous and durable links to both home and host societies that define transnational migration. Transnational migration is understood as the migratory processes whereby migrants create new social spaces by building and maintaining simultaneous attachments to their societies of origin and residence, and by transcending notions of unidirectional permanent migration and assimilation:

We define ‘transnationalism’ as the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. Immigrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political—that span borders we call ‘transmigrants.’ An essential element of transnationalism is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants’ sustain in both home and host societies. (Basch et al. 1994: 8)

Invoking the transnational turn, or paradigm shift to the “age of transnationalism” (Glick Schiller et al. 1995: 59), does not suggest a rupture or particular temporal moment of radical change in the quality of migratory movements. Rather, doing so refers to a shift in theorising and researching migration – in many ways a discursive shift (cf. Bailey 2001) – in response to not only the acceleration and globalisation of migrations, but also to a qualitative/quantitative shift in the ways in which (some) migrants engage with the world. It is precisely within the trends quoted at the beginning of this section, and particularly in the globalisation and acceleration of migration (Castles and Miller 2009), that a rethinking of movement, connectivity, and spatiality takes place<sup>2</sup>. Not only the pace of migratory movements as such has intensified over recent decades, but the “intensity and simultaneity of current long-distance, cross-border activities (...) which provide the recently emergent, distinctive and, in some contexts, now normative social structures and activities which (...) merit the term ‘transnationalism’” (Vertovec 1999: 448).

Some scholars have rightfully pointed out, that transnationalism might be a timely label for a pre-existing phenomenon rather than anything new at all (Tsuda 2003; Mintz 1998; Foner 1997). Cross-border links, correspondence

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<sup>2</sup> While only tangential to the arguments in this chapter, it is interesting to note that Glick Schiller et al. (1995: 50) have identified three factors encouraging migrant transnationalism. The deterioration of socio-economic conditions in sending as well as receiving countries caused by economic globalisation removes the perception of stability and security from the sending and from the receiving end of migration. Furthermore, racism experienced by migrants in receiving countries contribute to this sense of insecurity and, finally, migrants and their descendants can be sought after agents in the nation building efforts of both, sending and receiving countries. These factors can operate individually or in concert, depending on the particular socio-historical context.

and travel are not particular to any current generation of “transmigrants”, to borrow Glick Schiller’s term, but have existed in much earlier eras of migration. However, Vertovec and Cohen (1999) convincingly justify the transnational turn with reference to four dimensions: the possibility of multiple identities as well as multiple localities, the latter due to travel and information technologies; the globalisation of kinship ties and networks; the growth in remittances; and the disintegration of the binary opposition between host- and home societies (Vertovec and Cohen 1999: xvi). On a more general note, scholars defending transnationalism as novel and/or distinct have argued that although some form of transnational linkages has always been present among international migrants, their quantity, quality or characteristics have changed due to more recent circumstances accompanying (or caused by) economic globalisation. Lionnet and Shih (2005: 5) understand the transnational turn in the social sciences as *legitimised* by theories of globalisation. Additionally, developments in the travel sector as well as in information and communication technologies have facilitated an increase in transnational practices and connections (cf. Jones 1992; Rios 1992; Kearney 1995; Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Foner 1997; Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Portes et al. 1999; Vertovec and Cohen 1999).

Productively moving past the debates around the novelty and distinctness of transnationalism as a field of study and/or phenomenon, Wimmer and

Glick Schiller (2003, 2002) argue that a transnational approach helps avoid the pitfalls and fallacies of methodological nationalism in migration research. In contrast to Glick Schiller and colleagues (1992) who initially coined the term and defined transnationalism, Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2003; 2002) a decade later argue that transnationalism need not be viewed as the emergence of a research paradigm or new field of study *per se*, but that its processes had been previously largely veiled or trapped by methodological nationalism in social research, including in migration research<sup>3</sup>. They distinguish three forms of methodological nationalism: First, classical sociology's tendency of ignoring the influence of nation states in implicitly attributing nationalism to earlier stages in an evolutionist worldview that have been overcome in modernity. Second, empirical social sciences' tendency of unquestioningly accepting political and historical discourses surrounding nation-states as given has resulted in adopting societies contained by national borders as "natural" objects of social research. Lastly, social research has territorially focused on nation-states, contrasting processes within nation-states with other, presumably foreign or outside processes. Similarities and cross-border connections went largely unacknowledged (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 303-308). Amelina et al. (2012: 2) aptly summarise Wimmer and Glick Schiller's intervention by describing the three dimensions of methodological nationalism their work

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<sup>3</sup> Wimmer and Glick Schiller's critique of methodological nationalism did not materialise out of a void. For a more comprehensive genealogy of "challenges to the conceptual equation of societies and nation-states" that traces such interventions in the social sciences back as far as Marx and Engels see Amelina et al. (2012: 2-3).

identifies as omitting nationalism, naturalising the nation-state, and imposing territorial limitations. Migration studies, with their strong focus on sending and receiving countries, and assimilation or integration into particular nationally bound majority societies, might serve as paradigmatic example for methodological nationalism. A transnational perspective, then, can be read as a first step to remedy methodological nationalism in migration research (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 302). Shifting the focus from analysing immigrant or emigrant groups or host- and sending societies confined to particular nation-states to transnational processes certainly holds the potential for more careful attention to practices and experiences across national borders that were previously masked by methodological nationalism in migration research. As Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002; 2003) foreshadow, that potential is not fully realised<sup>4</sup> – a point I shall return to in due course.

## **Transnational trajectories**

To situate the notion of transnational space, this chapter picks up approximately at the point where transnationalism emerges as a somewhat distinct, if contested, paradigm within migration research to trace the trajectories research and theorising on transnational migration have taken.

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<sup>4</sup> But see Goldring and Landolt (2012) who re-assess the assumptions that their own previous projects in transnational migration studies were implicitly based on. They particularly critique the methodological nationalism underlying their selection of migrant groups for research based on nationality. They conclude by a “call for a nuanced, reflective approach to understanding ‘given’ populations, categories and units, including refugee, nationality and context” (2012: 59).

Glick Schiller *et al.* (1992) introduced transnationalism as a framework for the analysis of migratory processes, contingent on migrants' creation of new social fields by identifying with two or more societies and connecting their place(s) of origin with their place(s) of residence. A social field in this context can be defined "as a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed" (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1009). In the process of simultaneously identifying with their "home" and "host" societies, transnational migrants develop what Vertovec has termed "bifocality" in that references to both of those places "are constantly monitored and perceived as complementary aspects of a single space of experience" (Vertovec 2004: 975). This emphasis on transnational bifocality resonates with the construction of post-migrants as caught between two cultures that chapter one has briefly introduced. While less concerned with the element of struggle that the latter has tended to foreground, through its strong emphasis on attachments to two places transnational bifocality risks reducing the subject to its transnationality in similar ways.

While initial theorisations of transnational migration already contained the notion of emerging social fields, with all its potential for further theorising and research on discourses and practices shaping such spaces, as well as the ways in which a transnational social field might shape its subjects, early work

on transnational migration has taken to investigating the economic and political implications of transnational migration for states and the impact of transnational bifocality on migrants' practices. How transnationality shapes the "single space of experience" (Vertovec 2004: 975) and the becoming of transnational subjects seems to have taken a back seat in favour of sustained foci on two (usually national) contexts. Thus, what a transnational approach to migratory processes might achieve in terms of addressing methodological nationalism in migration research is only partially realised (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002, 2003). Attention has indeed shifted from the nation-state as hermetically sealed containers for all things social to cross-border practices, connections and processes. By widening the attention from one to two countries, and the practices resulting from cross-border connections as well as their impact on said countries, the naturalised frame of reference, however, has often remained the nation-state. Favell (2008) traces this tendency to transnational migration scholarship that responds to early critiques to the effect that the nation had been ignored in emphases on cross-border networks. The corrective move to simultaneity, he writes, had "fallen back into describing the binary interaction of migrants in sending and receiving contexts, and hence retains a focus on essentially the same kind of movers as immigration scholars" (Favell 2008: 270). Similarly, Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002; 2003) identify tendencies in transnational studies that reify the propensities of

methodological nationalism – particularly so where the focus is on the “trans-national community”. They write,

*Transnational* semantically refers us to the non-*transnational* or simply to the national as the entity that is crossed or superseded. Migrants are no longer uprooted or climbing up the assimilative ladder to the national middle classes, but they are still the others, foreign and alien to the nationally-bounded society. (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 324, original emphasis)

Transnationalism has in this sense not fully succeeded in pushing the boundaries of migration research beyond bound nations, as the referent largely remains the nation state.

With the wider dissemination of transnationalism in migration research and elsewhere, and due to its broad and sometimes ambiguous use, reservations have been voiced about the watering down of the terms transnational and transnationalism to the extent that they may be at risk of turning into an “empty conceptual vessel” (Guarnizo and Smith 1998: 4) or a “catch all and say nothing” (Pries 2008: 1) phrase. Portes and colleagues (1999) thus called for a sounder empirical establishment and delimitation of the phenomenon before engaging in further explanations of it, as well as for more precise definitions of the units under analysis and the distinction of particular types of transnationalism. They suggested that terming a process transnational should be conditional on it involving a “significant proportion of persons in the relevant universe”, on a “certain stability and resilience over time” and

not already being “captured by some pre-existing concept, making the invention of a new term redundant” (Portes et al. 1999: 219). As a result, a number of typologies and models of transnational processes in the field, as well as of scholarly work on transnationalism have been proposed. The remainder of this section briefly reviews the most prominent conceptual efforts to tidy up and legitimise, respectively further establish, transnationalism as a framework for migration research.

Individual transmigrants’ cross-border practices and their social networks represent transnationalism from below (Guarnizo and Smith 1998) and can, according to this framework, be distinguished from transnationalism from above, where states and transnational corporations are the main agents (Portes et al. 1999; Mahler 1998) engaging in transnational activities, respectively imposing them on others from above. In addition to the vertical distinction between transnationalism from above respectively from below, transnational practices take place in the economic, the political and the socio-cultural domains (Vertovec 2004: 971; Portes et al. 1999: 222). While a matrix of transnational sub-fields may open up interesting research questions, the emphasis lies on the nations in/out of which institutions, organisations as well as individuals operate, and on border-crossing nature of the practices and processes under analysis. In their theorisation of “minor transnationalism” Lionnet and

Shih (2005: 7) furthermore object to the binary opposition inherent in above/blow on the grounds that

[b]y extracting the site of resistance and defining it as transnationalism from below, it appears that there are two different transnationalisms in opposition and conflict, when in reality the minor and the major participate in one shared transnational moment and space structured by uneven power relations.

In addition to masking the power relations circulating within transnational social spaces, the transnational subject, that from the vantage point of this typology arguably functions as the agent of transnational practices from below, as well as being subject to transnationalism from above, fades from view. Other typologies, however, have refrained from further narrowing down and categorising transnationalism as such, as well as from tethering it too closely to a bifocal lens, and instead engaged with the modes of knowledge production and analytical lenses transnational approaches have fostered in migration scholarship and elsewhere.

Grewal and Kaplan (2001: 664-665), for instance, identify five modes by which transnational knowledges / knowledges on the transnational is produced: to describe transnational processes and “flows” of migration; to signal the decreasing relevance of the nation-state in a globalising world; as a synonym for diasporic; to designate a form of capitalist neo-colonialism; and to signal the “NGOisation” of (feminist) movements. Similarly, Khagram and Levitt (2008) have reviewed transnational scholarship and found five intellec-

tual foundations from which transnational studies are undertaken. Empirical transnationalism “focuses on describing, mapping, classifying and quantifying novel and/or potentially important transnational phenomena and dynamics” (Khagram and Levitt 2008: 22) and methodological transnationalism (not to be confused with methodological nationalism as defined by Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002 and outlined above) refers to “research designs and methodologies generating new types of data, evidence and observations that more accurately and rigorously capture transnational realities” (Khagram and Levitt 2008: 22). Theoretical transnationalism “formulates explanations and crafts interpretations that either parallel, complement, supplement or are integrated into existing frameworks and accounts” (Khagram and Levitt 2008: 22). Philosophical transnationalism “starts from the metaphysical assumption that social worlds and lives are inherently transnational” (Khagram and Levitt 2008: 22) and therefore are nothing particularly exceptional, while public transnationalism “creates space to imagine and legitimate options for social change and transformation that are normally obscured, by purposefully abandoning the expectation that most social processes are bounded and bordered” (Khagram and Levitt 2008: 22), opening space for transnational activism and social movements.

A further example is Vertovec’s work (1999, 2009) that theorises transnationalism as a conceptual lens through which to read various social pro-

cesses, and as a tool that productively *does* a number of things. He identifies six conceptual takes on transnationalism that I briefly recount here. Transnationalism as a social morphology (1) spans cross-border social formations for which ethnic diasporas are a paradigmatic example, with an emphasis on the notion of networks to capture connectedness and complexity within. Transnationalism as a type of consciousness (2) refers to simultaneous and multiple identifications where both, locality and globality are resisted and identities and social awareness are transformed into a more fluid transnational consciousness. Transnationalism as a type of consciousness furthermore facilitates the social forms and networks that denote transnationalism as a social morphology. Transnationalism as a mode of cultural production (3) allows for an analysis of hybrid social institutions and cultural practices, such as music, fashion, literature or film as well as the production and consumption of global forms of media more in general. Transnationalism as avenues of capital (4) is the arena of transnational corporations of global capitalism as well as of myriads of “little players” (Vertovec 2009: 8), for instance transnational migrants sending remittances to family. These economic activities on all levels have the potential of triggering further transnational practices in the social, political or cultural spheres. Additionally, transnationalism as a site of political engagement (5) spans the transnational activities of international organisations and NGOs as well as transnational social movements and the participation in home politics by transnational migrants. Finally, transnationalism as the

(re)construction of place or locality (6) is concerned with the continuous transformation that notions of space undergo. The importance of physical locality may have decreased somewhat due to higher degrees of mobility and a proliferation of accessible means of communication; thus, transnationalism from this point of view simultaneously entails a certain translocality (Vertovec 1999: xxii-xxv; 2009: 4-13).

Grewal and Kaplan (2001), Khagaram and Levitt (2008) and Vertovec (1999, 2009) share a concern with tracing the ways in which different scholarly perspectives conceptualise and apply transnational approaches rather than further pinpointing, defining, or typologising transnationality as such. Their work demonstrates that many modes of knowledge production on transnational spaces operate alongside one another, and thus facilitates conversations that engage with transnationality beyond a transnational bifocality that, alone, risks essentially transnationalising its subjects. Conceptually disentangling the various levels on which transnational approaches become productive provides a useful topography of transnationalism as a multitude of fields. This body of work allows me to situate this thesis in its wider frame of reference, clarifies where the dialogue I envisage might take place, and helps demarcate it from empirical or public transnationalism (Khagram and Levitt 2008: 22) in terms of what it can hope to achieve. This thesis thus takes place on the nexus between philosophical and theoretical transnationalism, accord-

ing to Khagram and Levitt's (2008) mapping of the field. From a conceptual angle, it seeks to integrate existing literatures towards mutually corrective accounts of becoming subject in, of, and through the transnational space. On the other hand, such disentanglements can only ever be partially successful. Through the lens of transnationalism as a social morphology (Vertovec 1999; 2009) with its emphasis of entangled complexity within transnational spaces, for instance, it becomes difficult to imagine where transnationalism as a type of consciousness might begin and end or where it seamlessly merges with transnationalism as modes of cultural production; or where both are entangled with transnational practices in the social, political or cultural spheres facilitated by transnationalism as avenues of capital and sites of political engagement (Vertovec 1999, 2009). In earlier work on transnational migration that strongly attached to transnational bifocality, and to a certain extent in the meta-analyses of transnational approaches this section has discussed, the transnational subject assumes a rather tacit position. It is present to engage in cross-border practices (be they economic, political, cultural or social) from below and is subject to state sponsored or corporate transnationalism from above (Guarnizo and Smith 1998). It appears as the agent of transnational practices and becomes subject to a range of transnational processes. It is, in different ways, furthermore the subject of much of the scholarly work on transnationalism that Grewal and Kaplan (2001) and Khagram and Levitt (2008) map. While the theories I draw on – intersectionality (see chapter three)

and the notion of queering (see chapter four) – have emerged within gender studies and queer theory rather than in scholarship on transnationalism, I hope to show that the queer intersectional lens on transnational subjects that comes out of this postdisciplinary dialogue contributes productively to the modes of transnational knowledge production discussed here.

### **Transnational social spaces**

In order to prevent a conflation of the notion of transnational social space with the broader sociological or anthropological concepts of society or community, Pries (2008) draws on an analogy with geometry and defines social practices, symbol systems, and the production and use of artefacts as the x, y, and z axes of social spaces. He explains how

[i]n distinguishing social practices, symbols and artefacts as the three constitutive dimensions of dense and durable societal spaces with 'relations of entanglement' (...), at least three ideal types of societal spaces could be identified as relevant for transnational studies: everyday life, organisations and institutions. (Pries 2008: 11-12)

Within each of these networked social spaces, routines, social norms and rules as well as mutual expectations are at work in producing various practices, subjectivities and relations (2008: 13). More generally speaking, transnational social spaces consist of the social networks and symbolic ties through which economic, cultural and social capital is exchanged, organised

and transformed (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Faist 2000). Faist (2000: 192) further describes the transnational social space as “constituted by the various forms of resources or capital of spatially mobile and immobile persons, on the one hand, and the regulations imposed by nation-states and various other opportunities and constraints, on the other.” The few attempts at pinning down the transnational space I have referred to here show that it does not lend itself to an easy all-encompassing definition. Its rather slippery contours are then what lead Pries (2008: 2-4) to identify the following four main challenges to transnationalism as a research programme: the necessity to meticulously define the units of reference, analysis, and measurement; to measure the empirical extent of transnationalism; to clearly distinguish transnational from non-transnational societal units; and to develop particular methodologies and methods for transnational research. The specific definition of the term, he suggests, distinguishes transnational social spaces from other forms of international and transnational relations by the means of a particular set of criteria: “the distribution of resources, culture, interests and power is polycentric and not monocentric; and, the relations and coordination between the different nations spanning local subunits are strong, dense and durable” (Pries 2008: 10). His conception of transnational social spaces is thus much narrower and closer to an ideal type than most other scholars’ use of the term transnational, as well as rigorously demarcated from other modes of international studies such as cross-border, or world systems studies (Pries and Seeliger

2012). Whether ideal-typically or empirically inclined, such attempts at narrowly determining what does and does not count as transnational, respectively who does and does not belong to a transnational space, not only risks bolstering the methodological nationalism transnational studies initially hoped to transcend, it also contributes to further silence the transnational subject and mask its becomings in and through the transnational space.

This thesis is interested in the space that emerges transnationally and the subjects that become within and through it – not so much in terms of the here/there respectively home/away binarisms, but in terms of meaning being produced and performed within the transnational space of everyday life, the discourses and practices that take place within it, and the cultural productions that are produced within it and further constitute it in turn. I thus follow Jackson *et al.* (2004) and their suggestion to broaden the scope “beyond the confines of still-bounded-but-displaced ‘ethnic communities’ to encompass a more multidimensional, materially heterogeneous social field, characterized by multiple inhabitations and disjunctions” (Jackson *et al.* 2004: 15). This allows for a conceptualisation of space as no longer confined to particular ethnically defined communities and their bifocal negotiations of subjectivity between home- and host-society and accounts for heterogeneity within: “Focusing on the spaces of transnationality, rather than just identifiable transnational communities distinguished from other (and often still normative) national

communities, opens up ways of exploring this multiplicity of transnational experiences and relations" (Jackson et al. 2004: 3). As geographers, their main concern is to shift the attention from "economic, political and cultural dimensions of transnationalism" to the "transformation of space" and to space as "constitutive of transnationality in all its different forms" (2004: 1). This understanding of the transnational space is indebted to Rouse who was one of the first scholars to identify "transnational migrant circuits", arguing that "we have all moved irrevocably into a new kind of social space" (Rouse 1991: 25), where "the place of the putative community (...) is becoming little more than a site in which transnationally organized circuits of capital, labour, and communications intersect with one another and with local ways of life" (Rouse 1991: 33). I understand the becoming of transnational subjects not only as embedded in, but as constituted through and constitutive of the transnational space. The transformations, syntheses and becomings taking place within such spaces, as Rouse's reference to multiple transnationalities and their intersections with "local ways of life" suggests, displace homogenising notions of community as well as linear analyses of cross-border practices – the transnational space is conceived as "less scripted and more scattered" (Lionnet and Shih 2005: 5). The transnational social space, conceptualised as the space transnationality takes place in, resonates with what Bhabha (1994: 55) theorises as the "Third Space, (...), which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no

primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew". These accounts of transnational space, then, untether from transnational bifocality and cross-border processes as such to foreground modes of transnationality that do not reduce the subject to two places, cultures or communities. While becomings in transnational spaces potentially draw on all or neither, it is the particular context in terms of its heterogeneity that are of interest here: "transnationality in all its different forms" (Jackson et al. 2004: 1) and the absence of "primordial unity or fixity" (Bhabha 1994: 55).

Foucault refers to the present era as the epoch of space:

we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment (...) when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (Foucault 1986: 22)

Although Foucault uses this notion of space and simultaneity to then elaborate on heterotopias, which have much concreter physical characteristics than the transnational social space – his examples include cemeteries, gardens or museums (Foucault 1986: 25-26) – I find this understanding of space useful in imagining the transnational social space as a basis for thinking about transnational becomings. In particular, the idea that space can consist of relations among a number of sites, remains in itself heterogeneous and that the sites relating within a space are taken as "irreducible to one another and absolutely

not superimposable on one another" (Foucault 1986: 23). In conversation with transnationalism, this notion of space holds the potential of transforming and uniting a set of different temporal and spatial locations: "By being experienced, expressed, and performed, transnational spaces transform into different forms of places" (Sørensen 1998: 244). Spaces where, like in Anzaldúa's (1999) ideological borderlands, (fictional) borders are transgressed in order to reach that hybrid third space, where "a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us" (Anzaldúa 1999: 103) unfolds. This borderland consciousness is characterized by an ability to transcend positivist binarisms, and deconstructs in order to construct anew. Identities in the borderland, or in the third space, are multiple and flexible, they are

an arrangement or series of clusters, a kind of stacking or layering of selves, horizontal and vertical layers, the geography of selves made up of the different communities you inhabit. (...) Where these spaces overlap is (...) the Borderlands. Identity is a process-in-the-making. (Anzaldúa 2000: 238)

As Brah (1996: 198) points out, the borders Anzaldúa evokes are metaphorical in nature, yet "far from being mere abstractions of a concrete reality, metaphors are part of the discursive materiality of power relations". Metaphorical borderlands resonate with the effects of localised physical borders, in terms of the regulation and control of those borders and what they have the potential to *do* to transnational lives.

While this chapter aligns itself with fluid and hybrid conceptualisations of transnationalism and space such as Brah's (1996) "diaspora space", grounding it in frameworks of transnational migration rather than fully relying on theories of hybridity (Bhabha 1994; Hall 1990) helps to take to heart some of the critiques levelled against all too fluid accounts of transnationality. Namely, this ambivalent positioning allows to mitigate against premature celebrations of hybridity (Hutnyk 2005; Puwar 2003; Spivak 1999; Mitchell 1997; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Chow 1993)<sup>5</sup> and the uncritical use of abstract in-betweenness and deterritorialised free-floating identity formation in researching transnational phenomena that Guarnizo and Smith (1998) rightfully warn against (see also Pratt and Yeoh 2003; Kaplan 1987). Their concern is based on a potential lack of contextuality that the metaphor of unbound transnational subjects conveys: "Transnational practices, while connecting collectivities located in more than one national territory, are embodied in specific social relations established between specific people, situated in unequivalocal localities, at historically determined times" (Guarnizo and Smith 1998: 11).

Even as recent developments in transportation and communication have facilitated transnational lifestyles (Castles and Miller 2009), living one's

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<sup>5</sup> Gilroy (1994) adds an additional layer to the critiques of celebratory hybridity by rejecting the prior purities that, in his view, the notion of hybridity implies: "Who the fuck wants purity? (...) the idea of hybridity, of intermixture, presupposes two anterior purities (...) I think there isn't any purity; there isn't any anterior purity (...) that's why I try not to use the word hybrid (...) Cultural production is not like mixing cocktails" (Gilroy 1994: 54-55, cited in Hutnyk 2005: 82).

life in a transnational social space does not necessitate frequent travel. Some may travel between their home- or ancestral country and their place of residence regularly, while others may be rooted in one primary setting but engage with the transnational space through their networks, practices or cultural frames of reference (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Mahler 1998). The social and cultural capital transnational migrants circulate not only plays an important role in their social mobility and political participation where they live, but is at the same time transformed and socially remitted to other participants in the transnational social space in form of normative structures, ideas, practices, identities and social capital (Levitt 2001). Mahler (1998) distinguishes those who travel frequently as part of earning their livelihoods, those who visit regularly, and those who live within a transnational social space despite never having migrated. Not only migrants themselves but also those who have never migrated, or travelled, can thus be embedded in a transnational social space (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1003).

These ideas echo Brah's (1996) conceptionalisation of "diaspora space" as

'inhabited' not only by those who have migrated and their descendants, but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of diaspora space (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'. The diaspora space is the site where the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native. (Brah 1996: 209)

“Staying put” here not only refers to post-migrant generations who have never migrated and have no direct attachment to their ancestors’ real or imagined homelands. Participation in this space is not conceptually tied to racial, ethnic or cultural belongings but open to “natives”, regardless of migratory or hereditary attachments. Brah (1996) theorises the conceptual diaspora space as distinct from empirical diasporas such as the paradigmatic example of the Jewish diaspora or others like the postcolonial South Asian diaspora. Her diaspora space

is where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed in the name of purity and tradition. (Brah 1996: 208)

The example Brah (1996) gives for her conceptualisation of the diaspora space is England, where a number of transnational social spaces not only intersect with one another but also with Britishness and Englishness. The choice of England as an example of diaspora space, rather than an empirical notion of, say, the Jewish or Afro-Caribbean diaspora, troubles dichotomous constructions of us/them and highlights the contested and fluid nature of boundary marking processes. This decoupling from the act of migration as such is central to the notion of transnational space this thesis works with. This idea is taken up by Jackson and colleagues (2004), when they write that “increasing numbers of people participate in transnational space, irrespective

of their own migrant histories or ‘ethnic’ identities” (Jackson et al. 2004: 2). They very usefully conceptualise transnational social space as “complex, multi-dimensional and multiply inhabited” (Jackson et al. 2004: 3) temporarily or permanently by people from diverse backgrounds who “may have residual affinities to the transnational identities of earlier migrant generations or emergent identities as a result of their own current transnational experiences” (Jackson et al. 2004: 3). Particularly the post-migrant second and subsequent generations may not travel regularly, or at all, to their ancestors’ places of origin and are unlikely to “maintain the everyday bifocality and practices of their migrant forbearers, but such parental orientations and practices are apt to have an enduring impression on their children’s identities, interests and sociocultural activities.” (Vertovec 2004: 992). Additionally, Guarnizo and Smith (1998: 19) have noted that while for post-migrants no immediate sense of connectedness to their heritage may be apparent, new forms of ethnic pride or nationalism may emerge. While much literature on transnationalism seems to deal either explicitly or implicitly with first generation transnational migrants, post-migrant generations do not simply drop out of the transnational social space (Lee 2011; Fouron and Glick Schiller 2002; Levitt 2002), but negotiate their own ways of inhabiting, (re)producing, and (re)imagining that space. To think about how so, the distinction between ways of being and ways of belonging that Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) propose is helpful. Ways of being in a social space refer to social relations and practices individ-

uals actively engage in without necessarily identifying with the labels attached to it. Ways of belonging to a social space, on the other hand, combine social relations and practices with an active awareness and acceptance of the type of identity these actions represent. Individuals embedded in transnational social spaces choose different combinations of ways of being and ways of belonging according to the given context (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 1010). Chapter three will engage more fully with the becoming of the transnational subject. Here, my concern has been to outline the broad conceptualisation of the transnational social space this thesis takes as its point of departure, and to make explicit its theoretical reliance on Brah (1996) and Jackson et al. (2004).

### **Transnational intersections**

This section turns to the ways in which transnationalism has been in conversation with gender as a category of analysis, and thus sets the scene for the broader dialogue between transnationalism, intersectionality and queer theory that this thesis engages in. It is less concerned with the empirical intersections between gender, sexuality and transnationality as such than with revisiting parts of the conversation between transnational approaches in migration studies and feminist and gender studies, respectively the ways in which transnationalism has been taken up by feminist and gender scholars and vice

versa. In doing so, it further paves the way for for intersectionalising the transnational space, and in turn queering intersectionality throughout the following chapters.

Gender as a category of analysis as well as an element intersecting with others like class or race in structuring the social world, has historically been ignored by decades of research and theorising on international migration (Pessar and Mahler 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000; Morokvašić 1984). After a period of bringing women in, the decentring of “woman” as the universal feminist category of reference (Lorde 1981; hooks 1982; Spelman 1988; Hill Collins 1990) and growing awareness of gender as intersecting with class and race (Hill Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1989) shifted the research focus of feminist migration scholars to gendered patterns of international migration and migration’s impact on gender inequality and gender relations (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000: 117). While gender has come to be seen as a constitutive element of international migration, and gendered analyses of transnational migration have become fairly widespread, feminist research has not fully succeeded in transforming migration scholarship to being gender aware (Boyd and Grieco 2003). Even though the transnational paradigm is a comparatively recent development within scholarship on international migration and has emerged at a time when pioneering feminist scholars were already applying gender theory to the practice of migration research (e.g. Morokvašić 1984 and the 1984 special

issue of *The International Migration Review* on women in migration), the same male bias and the same neglect of gender prevalent in conventional migration research were initially observed. At best, gender was conflated with sex and used as a descriptive variable to disaggregate data by men and women. Gender should not be considered “simply a variable to be measured, but a set of social relations that organize immigration patterns” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994: 3). Hondagneu-Sotelo (2000: 119), however also notes that “feminist-inflected migration research has been more enthusiastically received by those working in gender studies, in race, class, or gender intersectionalities, and even in postcolonial studies than it has by those working in mainstream migration studies”. Literature seeking to “bring gender in” (Pessar and Mahler 2003: 812) subsequently came forward, once again, as an intervention into an already ongoing scholarly debate on transnationalism in migration (Fouron and Glick Schiller 2001).

Pessar and Mahler’s (2001: 445) “gendered geographies of power in transnational spaces” aim at encouraging scholars “to interrogate how gender relations are negotiated across national borders among migrant women and men and how gender articulates transnationally with other modes of identity” (Pessar and Mahler 2003: 815). The gendered geographies of power consist of three main building blocks: geographic scales, social location and power geometry. Geographic scales refer to “multiple spatial and social scales (e.g.,

the body, the family, the state) across transnational terrains" (Pessar and Mahler 2001: 445). Social location, on the other hand, consists of gendered positions within stratified power relations based on factors such as historical, political or economic locations. The last building block refers to Massey's (1994: 149, cited in Pessar and Mahler 2001: 446) concept of power geometry to examine the conditionalities of agency based on different social locations and the power relations inherent in them. In summary, the gendered geographies of power allow for gender sensitive research into complex transnational contexts, taking particular historicity as well as spatial and social circumstances into account. In practice, however, gendered research on transnational spaces and migration continued to use gender in a predominantly binary way, to compare and contrast women's and men's experiences, advantages and disadvantages in transnational contexts (cf. *Identities* special issue 7(4)). In her analysis of citizenship practices in the U.S.-Mexican transnational space, Goldring (2001: 526), for example, argues that transmigrant women, due to their "adherence to patriarchal gender relations" predominantly exercise a feminised citizenship that is oriented towards family and children, schooling, health issues or the local environment. Transmigrant men, on the other hand, exercise home-state oriented citizenship, for example by getting involved in hometown associations. Such gendered differences are then understood to contribute to divergent aspirations between men and women regarding long-term settlement vs. eventually returning to their place of origin. Research that

thus recognises that transnationality cannot be the only relevant category of analysis (cf. Erel and Lutz 2012) when thinking about transnational subjects by including gender, indeed by successfully showing how gender is relevant to all transnational processes, in turn has the potential to re-inscribe binary categories not only on a *transnational* level but also in terms of reducing gendered analysis to a naturalised male/female dichotomy. Taking an intersectional approach (cf. Purkayastha 2012; Levitt 2011; Yuval-Davis 2011a, 2011b; Nagar and Swarr 2010; McCall 2005; Brah and Phoenix 2004; Crenshaw 1989) to transnational spaces allows for an analysis of the transnational subject that pays close attention to the contextual multiplicity such a space entails.

Kaplan and Grewal's (1994) transnational feminist account of "scattered hegemonies", on the other hand, draws critical attention to power relations that are simultaneously situated on multiple levels – domestic, local, regional, national and transnational – thus permeating "every level of social existence" in "varied and historically specific" ways (1994: 13). The ensuing feminist transnationalism(s) have predominantly been concerned with transnational feminism(s) in terms of contestations, solidarities, movements and practices (cf. Alexander and Mohanty 2010, 1997; Nagar and Swarr 2010; Tambe 2010; Puar 2007, 2002; Mohanty 2003). Grewal and Kaplan

use the term transnational (...) in order to reflect [the] need to destabilize rather than maintain boundaries of nation, race, and gender. Transnational is a term that signals attention to uneven and dissimilar

circuits of culture and capital. Through such critical recognition, the links between patriarchies, colonialisms, racisms, and other forms of domination become more apparent and available for critique or appropriation. (2000: 2)

Such a multi-facetted understanding of transnationality that never loses sight of the ways in which power circulates transnationally, translates well from feminist movements to the transnational migrations, spaces, and becoming that this thesis thinks about. Indeed, intersecting practices and discourses taking place within transnational spaces point to the complexity of how that space is constituted and how the transnational subject becomes through the space and vice versa: "once established, the maintenance and reproduction of relations of power, status, gender, race, and ethnicity become inextricably enmeshed in the reproduction of transnational social fields" (Smith and Guarnizo 1998: 19). The ongoing dialogue between transnationalism and intersectionality not only takes up these critical feminist engagements with transnationalism, but encourages thinking transnational becoming beyond transnationality, as well as for extending a gendered analysis beyond comparing and contrasting the transnational practices of men and women.

Nagar and Swarr theorise transnational feminism as inherently intersectional in approach:

we propose that transnational feminisms are an intersectional set of understandings, tools, and practices that can: (a) attend to racialized, classed, masculinized, and heteronormative logics and practices of globalization and capitalist patriarchies, and the multiple ways in

which they (re)structure colonial and neocolonial relations of domination and subordination; (b) grapple with the complex and contradictory ways in which these processes both inform and are shaped by a range of subjectivities and understandings of individual and collective agency; and (c) interweave critiques, actions, and self-reflexivity so as to resist a priori predictions of what might constitute feminist politics in a given place and time. (Nagar and Swarr 2010: 5)

While chapter four, where intersectionality enters into dialogue with queer theory, will argue that intersectionality does not fully deliver on attending to (hetero)normativities, it is such a multiple understanding of transnational feminism that this thesis aligns itself with. The shift in focus from transnational feminism(s) to knowledge productions on the transnational space and transnational becomings / becoming transnational is ever so slight but important. From a transnational feminist perspective, applying an intersectional lens to transnational becomings seems like an obvious move. In Nagar and Swarr's definition above, for instance, a transnational feminism is always already intersectional, attentive to multiple power relations and the ways in which they inform the production of subjectivities, and always already situated and reflexive. This illustrates well how different literatures concerned with transnational subjects have evolved in parallel rather than in dialogue. Many modes of producing knowledge on transnational spaces and subjects that I have drawn on in this chapter – including some feminist scholarship on (transnational) migration and spaces – have not always been attentive to the multiply intersecting dimensions that Nagar and Swarr (2010) and Brah (1996) theorise as inherent in such spaces. At the same time, some trans-

national feminist scholarship has been less attentive to transnationality as a category of analysis in itself, to the ways in which transnationality affects the becoming of subjects, than to power relations within transnational capitalism, post/neocoloniality, or transnational social movements.

### **Concluding remarks**

This chapter has set the scene for the dialogue with intersectionality and queer theory this thesis engages the transnational space in. To do so, it has traced the transnational turn in migration studies, and drawn on a range of theorists to construct the transnational space as the field this dialogue takes place in. In summary, the transnational turn is read as an intervention into classical theories of migration that overemphasised assimilationist ideologies and the impact of migration on individual nation states conceived as (migrant) sending or receiving countries. The transnational turn has shifted scholarly attention to enduring attachments to both and other cross-border processes and practices. Early work under the transnational paradigm in migration studies has then strongly emphasised transnational bifocality in terms of a narrow focus on economic, political and social cross-border transactions, and has thus tended to reduce the transnational subject to its transnational practices. As a consequence, the transnational subject has remained rather

opaque (despite its ever-presence as an agent of transnationality); and the methodological nationalism that this scholarship set out to amend (cf. Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) was partially re-instated by retaining two (rather than one) nations as naturalised frames of reference.

The understanding of the transnational space this thesis aligns itself with, however, is open, porous and multi-layered and emphasises heterogeneity and multiplicity within such spaces. It draws on scholars who decouple the transnational space from the act of migration as such to account for post-migrants and other unruly subjects in the same spaces (cf. Levitt 2011; Jackson et al. 2004; Vertovec 2004; Mahler 1998; Brah 1996), and is situated at the conceptual end of the mappings of transnational scholarship (cf. Vertovec 2009; Khagaram and Levitt 2008; Grewal and Kaplan 2001) this chapter has outlined. It furthermore places the emphasis on the spaces transnationality takes place in, and on what might emerge anew within such spaces rather than a narrowly defined transnational bifocality. This transnational space is particularly aligned with Brah's (1996) work on the "diaspora space". Brah defines her diaspora space as "the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and psychic processes" where the "boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of 'us' and 'them', are contested" (Brah 1996: 205). To Brah, as well as other transnational feminist scholars this chapter has invoked, such

spaces are inherently intersectional: "The similarities and differences across the different axes of differentiation (...) articulate and disarticulate in the diaspora space, marking as well as being marked by the complex web of power" (Brah 1996: 205). Drawing on scholarship that shows how transnationality is by no means the only axis of differentiation in transnational spaces, the final section of this chapter has thus shifted from mapping (and situating my work in) the wider field to introducing the ongoing dialogue between the transnational space and gender studies this thesis participates in. This conversation continues in chapter three, where it is joined by queer migration scholarship that extends an invitation to draw on queer theory more broadly, beyond the study of queer subjects in migration research.

## **Chapter Three: Intersectionally Transnational**

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*“Mattering is differentiating, and which differences come to matter, matter in the iterative production of different differences.” (Barad 2007: 137)*

This chapter takes the notion of transnational social space outlined in chapter two as its basis for exploring processes of becoming within. How does one become a subject of/in/through a transnational social space? And, what other differences that matter are relevant to transnational becomings? If my aim is a conceptual conversation about knowledge productions on transnational subjects – what is the relationship between a critique of reducing the subject to its transnationality and retaining the “transnational” in transnational becomings? This discussion builds on the transnational intersections chapter two has begun to unpack by placing transnationality in conversation with intersectionality. This chapter first analytically disentangles discursive, performative and material dimensions in the becoming of subjects, to then argue

for their entangled nature. Thinking of the transnational subject in terms of material-discursive entanglements is helpful in thinking through its curious silence in earlier knowledge productions on transnational migrations and spaces. Second, the chapter turns to intersectional theory and extends the conversation between intersectionality and transnationalism begun in the previous chapter to an explicit understanding of transnationality as a category of intersectional analysis. This chapter thus continues to emphasise intersectionality as a productive intervention into knowledge productions on transnational becomings in particular. Lastly, the chapter takes up the invitation to productively use queer methodologies beyond the study of queer subjects that queer migrations literature extends to scholarship on transnational spaces. This discussion paves the way for the queering of intersectionality that chapter four then engages in.

### **Material discursive entanglements**

While I ask how people become transnational subjects, I momentarily place the emphasis on the subject rather than on transnational. The question I pose here is thus not primarily what is *transnational* about transnational subjects, but how might *subject formation* take place within a transnational social space. What may seem like a small nuance at first glance essentially allows me

to shift the focus from isolating aspects of transnationality to viewing transnationality as one of many entangled paths along which to become subject within and through transnational spaces. This section first turns to the discursive production of the subject. Discourse has become “one of the most popular and least defined terms in the vocabulary of Anglo-American academics” (Sawyer 2002: 434). Different disciplines have used it in very different ways, given the concept a number of meanings referring to different aspects of content:

“Post-colonial theory: discourse is a system of domination (...) Anthropology: discourse is a culture or ideology (...) Sociolinguistics: discourse is a speech style or register (...) Psychology: discourse is a physical or bodily practice (...) Feminist theory: discourse is a type of subject. (Sawyer 2002: 434-435)

Clearly then, working with the, or rather *a* notion of discourse, particularly in a postdisciplinary project, requires me to make explicit what I refer to when using expressions like discourse or the discursive production of meaning. To do so, I briefly turn to Foucault, who viewed his work as motivated by a continuous thinking about how people become subjects:

the goal of my work (...) has not been to analyse the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis. My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects [and] it is not power, but the subject, which is the general theme of my research. (Foucault 1982: 777-778)

The *modes* he refers to in this passage cover the various aspects of subject formation his work as a whole has engaged with. The first, aptly termed “scientific classification” by Rabinow (1984: 8), is concerned with “modes of

inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences" and provides the ways in which a subject can understand him/herself as an object of science. The second<sup>1</sup> mode objectivises the subject by the means of "dividing practices" (Rabinow 1984: 8)<sup>2</sup> that can either work on it internally or externally. The third mode of objectification is directly concerned with processes of subjectivation, for example by the means of technologies of the self (Foucault 1982: 777-778). When elaborating on his work on sexuality as a contextualised experience, Foucault further clarifies the three modes as "the correlation of a domain of knowledge, a type of normativity and a mode of relation to the self" (Foucault 1984b: 333). The stance I take in this chapter is that while analytically distinguishable to a certain extent, these different modes by which a subject is produced are intimately entangled. While I think of the becoming of transnational subjects neither from a purely Foucaultian perspective, nor as a purely discursive matter, the notion that discourses contribute to the formation of subjects is crucial. Discourses consist of social practices "that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972: 54). The power/knowledge complex is constitutive of the discursive production of objects: "Indeed, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together" (Foucault 1978: 100). Objects in this context can refer to objects of study as I have introduced them in chapter one, and thus to the transnational subject as

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<sup>1</sup> See also Rabinow (1984: 10) for a discussion on how the first and second mode differ and overlap.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of such practices include the isolation of lepers, the confinement of the poor or mentally ill, as well as "the rise of modern psychiatry and its entry into the hospitals, prisons, and clinics throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and finally the medicalization, stigmatization, and normalization of sexual deviance in modern Europe" Rabinow (1984: 8)

the object that this thesis postdisciplinarily orients itself around. Foucault “never intended to isolate discourse from the social practices that surround it. Rather, he was experimenting to see how much autonomy could legitimately be claimed for discursive formations” (Rabinow 1984: 10). This is to emphasise that Foucault’s subject is not only discursively produced but at the same time a material subject:

we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts etc. We should try to grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subjects. (Foucault 1976: 97)

The potentially competing discourses as well as the multiplicity of materials, desires, etc. through which transnational subjects become, circulate in the transnational space. To think through the relationship between discourse and materiality it is useful to turn to Butler’s theorising of performativity for a moment. She stresses that “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate “act”, but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler 1993: 2). “Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance” (Butler 1993: 95). Thus, whether we think about performativity in relation to sex, as Butler does in *Bodies that Matter*, or other discourses and practices constitutive of the subject, what we think about is the materialisation, the mattering or the becoming material and matter

making of discourses. This mattering takes place within a given context, at a given time and place, and is constrained as well as sustained by the norms and discourses specific to its temporal and spatial context. The production of the subject through discourse performatively plays out on the material surface of the body where the productive nature of discourse leaves the potential for subjects to “not merely exceed the bounds of cultural intelligibility, but effectively expand the boundaries of what is, in fact, culturally intelligible” (Butler 1990: 39). To consolidate the divide between a subject as discursively produced and objections regarding the materiality of the agentic subject, Butler proposes “a return to the notion of matter, not as a site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the *effect* of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (Butler 1993: 9, emphasis mine). The dichotomy between a free floating discursively produced subject and a fixed or determined materiality of the body need not be one. Performativity allows us to take into account the complex ways in which a subject comes into being without disentangling the material body from the performativity of discourse.

Despite Foucault’s explicit rejection of a pre-discursive body on which discourse inscribes itself, “[n]othing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men” (Foucault 1984a: 87-88), he occasionally implies a body as blank canvas

waiting for cultural inscription. He does so, for instance, in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* where he states that “[t]he body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas)” (Foucault 1984a: 83), as well as in the introduction to *Herculine Barbin* where he (rather romanticisingly) refers to the “happy limbo of a non-identity” (Foucault 1980: xiii).

Butler (1989: 607) comments on this paradox thusly:

Foucault appears to have identified in a prediscursive and prehistorical “body” a source of resistance to history and to culture (...). That this is contrary to Foucault’s stated program to formulate power in its generative as well as juridical modes seems clear. Yet his statements on “history” appear to undermine precisely the insight into the constructed status of the body which his studies on sexuality and criminality were supposed to establish.

Referring to this apparent split between the body on the one hand and its discursive inscription on the other, and the ways in which this split appears, she furthermore notes: “This marking is the result of a diffuse and active structuring of the social field. This signifying practice effects a social space for and of the body within certain regulatory grids of intelligibility” (Butler 1990: 178). The ways in which, for instance, gender norms are performed in order to achieve such intelligibility or recognition within a (trans-national) space “claim the place of nature or claim the place of symbolic necessity, and they do this only by occluding the ways in which they are performatively established” (Butler 2004: 209).

While Butler's work on performativity primarily centres around the performativity of gender – she defines gendered subjects as performative in that “[t]here is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler 1990: 34) – the reference to a social space and its specific grids of intelligibility hints at the potential of performativity in relation to the transnational space. While discourses work on the body to performatively produce meaning, the body is no static canvas waiting to be touched by the brush of history, or culture, or discourse: “Indeed, the critical inquiry that traces the regulatory practices within which bodily contours are constructed constitutes precisely the genealogy of ‘the body’ in its discreteness that might further radicalize Foucault’s theory” (Butler 1990: 181). The ways in which this relates to transnationality is further explored later in this chapter where I turn to Foucault’s discussion of descent and emergence (Foucault 1984a).

The subject becomes intelligible to its surroundings by performatively producing “the effect of an internal core or substance (...) on the surface of the body” (Butler 1990: 185). For instance, “[t]hat the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (Butler 1990: 185). Importantly, performativity thus allows this thesis to think of differences as materially and discursively

produced to *appear* essential without understanding such differences as inherent to the subject.

the recasting of the matter of bodies as the effect of a dynamic of power, such that the matter of bodies will be indissociable from the regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the signification of those material effects (Butler 1993: 2)

Thus “neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior” (Barad 2003: 822) but are joined performatively. The indissociability of matter from discourse in the performative production of subjects forms an important starting point for the following discussion of the entangled nature of transnational becomings.

Villa (2011: 172) draws attention to the difference between subjects and people in Judith Butler’s work, where subjects are “sort of neat and orderly intelligible discursive positions”, while people are “somewhat untidy complexities”. She contends that “real-life persons are – compared with discursive order – a mess: untidy, complex, fuzzy, multi-layered, dynamic” (Villa, 2011: 173). While my work does not follow a distinct line between a subject and a person, I find this reminder of human messiness very useful when thinking about the becoming of subjects within the inherently complex and multi-layered transnational social space. I turn to Barad’s (2003; 2007; 2008) work on entanglement<sup>3</sup> – the intra-workings of matter and meaning – to further think

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<sup>3</sup> In *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Barad (2007) closely engages with the work of Physicist Niels Bohr, one of the founding figures of quantum physics, to develop the notion of entanglement, which I draw on very partially (without referring to the

about the material and discursive becoming of transnational subjects in both/and rather than either/or fashion.

To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not pre-exist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating. Which is not to say that emergence happens once and for all, as an event or as a process that takes place according to some external measure of space and of time, but rather that time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and future. (Barad 2007: ix)

I reproduce this quote at some length here because it illustrates better than I ever could just how much Barad's notion of entanglement resonates with the becoming of subjects in and through transnational space. It speaks of the ways in which time and space constitute the contextuality of the transnational social space and of the ways in which matter and meaning coincide in transnational subjects. It speaks of reconfigurations that transcend spatial notions of here and there as well as temporal narratives referring to pasts and futures. It also speaks of how neither materiality nor discourse deserve primacy, or can even be *disentangled* from one another. Subjects become processually, continuously, intra-relationally – that is, in intra-action with them-

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underlying quantum physics) here. "Bohr's philosophy-physics (the two were inseparable for him) poses a radical challenge not only to Newtonian physics but also to Cartesian epistemology and its representationalist triadic structure of words, knowers, and things. (...) Bohr rejects the atomistic metaphysics that takes 'things' as ontologically basic entities. For Bohr, things do not have inherently determinate boundaries or properties, and words do not have inherently determinate meanings. Bohr also calls into question the related Cartesian belief in the inherent distinction between subject and object, and knower and known" (Barad 2003: 813). Where the relationship between materiality and discourse (including the passivity of matter), the possibility of objectivity, and questions around measurement are concerned, the social sciences ontologically rely on the Newtonian conception of the physical world that quantum physics has since overhauled. Barad suggests that "we need a reassessment of these notions in terms of the best physical theories we currently have" and formulates her agential-realist framework as a response.

selves, others, discourses, and the transnational social space itself. Entanglement refers to the inseparability of subjects from the dynamic and performative configurations of space, time and matter they emerge through and (re)produce, from their material and discursive conditions of becoming, and the boundary-making practices in which they engage. I might tentatively add to that list the boundary-making and/or –marking matters like borders, walls, or fences they encounter along the way. In turn, the transnational space can be read as such a dynamic and performative configuration of “spacetimematter” (Barad 2007, 2001) that intra-acts with its subjects. Bodily and subjective boundaries, as well as the temporal and spatial boundaries of the transnational social space are equally entangled, equally intra-related and dynamically in continuous emergence. Transnational subjects do not materialise bound “in a container called space” and “marked by an exterior parameter called time”. In the transnational social space they intra-act with, “temporality and spatiality are produced and reconfigured in the (re)making of material-discursive boundaries and their constitutive exclusions” (Barad 2001: 90). Matter, the root of materiality, is not conceptualised as written on by discourse, or given meaning by culture, but in more communicative ways including the possibility that “nature scribbles” and “flesh reads” (Kirby 1997: 127). “Matter is neither fixed and given nor the mere end result of different processes. Matter is produced and productive, generated and generative. Matter is agentive, not a fixed essence or property of things” (Barad 2007: 137).

Discursive practices produce boundaries between what counts as human and non-human, male or female, heterosexual or queer, between what is understood as transnational or national, or in other words between what does (or does not) become culturally intelligible: “Boundary-making practices, that is, discursive practices, are fully implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity through which phenomena come to matter” (Barad 2003: 822). Barad rejects a representationalist “fixation on ‘words’ and ‘things’” (2003: 814). Much of our thinking, theorising and relating to the world, she argues, is infected by a certain “thingification—the turning of relations into ‘things’, ‘entities’, ‘relata’”. The earlier modes by which knowledge on transnational subjects has been produced, as well as the methodological and theoretical concerns around the delimitation of transnationality as a phenomenon and transnationalism as a theory that I have discussed in chapter two are guilty of such “thingification”. In fact, one of their main concerns has been to make sure that transnationalism becomes a legitimate and neatly demarcated “thing”. Chapter four will furthermore engage with some ways in which the same might be argued about intersectional theory, when and if it is concerned with drawing up lists of intersections to consider and with operationalising it. Instead, Barad advocates for scholarship to

acknowledge nature, the body, and materiality in the fullness of their becoming without resorting to the optics of transparency or opacity, the geometries of absolute exteriority or interiority, and the theoretization of the human as either pure cause or pure effect. (Barad 2003: 815)

A focus on discursive practices rather than pure words and material relations conceptualised as phenomena rather than things, allows for ways of producing knowledges of the world that does not presuppose inherent boundaries and properties of either transnational spaces or its subjects.

To conceptualise transnational becomings as material-discursive entanglements as the theorists this chapter is in dialogue with suggest, is ont-epistemologically<sup>4</sup> reliant on the inseparability of discourse and the material body: “discursive practices, are fully implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity through which phenomena come to matter. In other words, materiality is discursive (...), just as discursive practices are always already material (...)" (Barad 2003: 822). In conversation with this literature, the transnational space within which such entanglements take place thus turns into an entanglement of discourse and matter in itself. Its subject, then, is thus not a neat and independent entity, but very much entangled with and continuously emerging through its material and discursive surroundings: transnational becomings take place through the entanglements within/with one-another, within/with transnationality and other differences, and within/with the transnational space.

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<sup>4</sup> “We don’t obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are *of* the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming. The separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse. *Onto-epistemology* – the study of practices of knowing in being – is probably a better way to think about the kind of understanding that we need to come to terms with how specific intra-actions matter” (Barad 2007: 185, original emphasis).

## **Emerging transnationally**

In theorising his genealogical method as opposed “to the search of ‘origins’”, Foucault argues that the origin of things and subjects is not something to be found or unmasked, that no “primordial truth” and no “original identity” (Foucault 1984a: 77-78) awaits discovery. Most relevantly to the conversation this thesis engages in, he reflects on elements of descent (Herkunft) as well as emergence (Entstehung)<sup>5</sup>, both closely linked to an understanding of transnational subjects that seeks to retain transnationality as (partially and potentially) constitutive of transnational becomings without essentially transnationalising the subject. Whilst descent, at first encounter, may appear dangerously close to notions of fixed genetic and hereditary traits, Foucault reads it in much more fluid ways and describes it as unsettling “what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself” (1984a: 82). The notion of descent does refer to group affiliations “sustained by the bonds of blood, tradition, or social class” (Foucault 1984a: 80-81), but it does not treat these affiliations or traits as something essentially given or inherent to the subject. On the contrary, descent is understood as an “assemblage of faults,

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<sup>5</sup> In a close reading of Nietzsche, Foucault disentangles the frequent translation of the German terms Entstehung, Herkunft, as well as Ursprung into the English term origin. While origin (Ursprung) understood as essential, fixed, and already there is rejected, descent (Herkunft) and emergence (Entstehung) are retained and elaborated on as more precisely capturing the object of genealogy (Foucault 1984a: 78-80). For the purpose of this chapter, to draw on this distinction towards a material-discursive conception of transnational subjects, I adopt the English terms descent and emergence as explicated by Foucault without engaging further with Nietzschean philosophy.

fissures, and heterogeneous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within or from underneath" (Foucault 1984a: 82). At the same time, descent is embodied and historicised. Descent incorporates everything the body is exposed to, such as "diet, climate and soil" (Foucault 1984a: 83), as well as the "accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us" (Foucault 1984a: 81) and as such inscribes "itself in the nervous system, in temperament, in the digestive apparatus; it appears in faulty respiration, in improper diets, in the debilitated and prostrate bodies of those whose ancestors committed errors" (Foucault 1984a: 82). Thus, the idea clearly is not to look for fixed characteristics or to identify hereditary traits to determine, for example, to what extent someone might be considered British, or Asian, or transnational more generally, but to acknowledge the potential of history, past and passing events to inscribe themselves on a body and retain meaning (to matter, following the discussion in the previous section) – heterogeneous, fragmented networks of meaning where transnationality by descent will not stand in isolation, but intersect with numerous and ever-changing other points of reference. Regarding the transnational space, this notion of descent allows to take into consideration fluid attachments to what has been called the "homeland", the "country of origin" or the "sending country" and corresponding cultural affiliations, without taking any stable reference to such a place for granted and

without presupposing its relevance for transnational becomings. This opens up space for taking the bifocality, so important in earlier accounts of transnationalism, into account where necessary, whilst simultaneously moving beyond it. In other words, this reading of descent does not reduce the transnational subject to a static set of places of origin or dwelling. Rather, it acknowledges that cultural affiliations, family relations and trajectories of past and present migrations can produce meaning and inscribe themselves on a subject, without presupposing the kinds of meaning that are produced, nor the importance that those meanings take on contextually. In this sense, it reconciles the notion of transnational bifocality with later theorisations of the transnational space as porous and fluid that this thesis has aligned itself with in chapter two.

With no less potential for inscription on the subject than descent, and equally temporally and spatially historicised, the notion of emergence captures moments of arising, of interaction and of struggle, “produced through a particular stage of forces” (Foucault 1984a: 83). Emergence is understood as the struggle within and against “meticulous procedures that impose rights and obligations. It establishes marks of its power and engraves memories on things and even within bodies” (Foucault 1984a: 85). While the examples Foucault invokes in his discussion of emergence relate to altogether larger questions, such as the emergence of the human species or the Reformation, I sug-

gest that on a smaller scale the notion of emergence can similarly relate to transnational spaces as outlined in chapter two. In a transnational space then, the moments of struggle and interaction that characterise emergence in Foucault's account take on the form of scattered hegemonies (Grewal and Kaplan 1994), of "uneven and dissimilar circuits of culture and capital" and of "the links between patriarchies, colonialisms, racisms, and other forms of domination" that Grewal and Kaplan (2000: 2) so crucially locate in the transnational. A second, more literal, sense in which emergence plays out in the transnational space lies in the instances where new kinds of spaces *emerge* transnationally, for instance in its quality of Bhabha's hybrid third space where "the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (1994: 55) with the potential to "transform into different forms of places" (Sørensen 1998: 244).

This analogy between decent/emergence and becoming through transnational space is useful particularly because it allows for simultaneous attention to transnational attachments in the sense of transnationality that attaches itself to the subject through culture and kinship, and to the hybrid space that emerges anew through transnationality. Such an entangled understanding of transnationality as potentially (but by no means necessarily) referencing descent as well as emergence facilitate modes of thinking transnational becomings that acknowledges differences that matter as constitutive of the transna-

tional subject without culturally, ethnically or racially essentialising that difference. It is a way of accounting for the specifically transnational about the transnational subject without presupposing it, without *a priori* assuming transnational bifocality or an essential “transnational identity” that consists of characteristics inherent to two or more distinct cultures/nations/societies. Thus, it is a way of acknowledging the fluid attachments to ethnicity, culture, religion, nation or transnationality in becoming in/through a transnational space without reducing the subject to such markers. The following section returns the conversation to intersectionality. In relation to the discussion here, intersectionality has the potential to account for both the power dynamics by which transnationality operates through emergence and the (fluid) cultural affiliations at play in transnationality as it is imagined through descent.

### **Intersectional transnationality**

Intersectionality has been described as “the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies (...) has made so far” (McCall 2005: 1771) as well as an emerging “new paradigm in gender and queer studies” (Winker and Degele 2011: 51). While within feminist circuits theoretical and methodological debates as well as empirical work applying intersectional approaches have been manifold and productive, outside of fields directly related to wom-

en's and feminist studies, feminist theory or gender studies, intersectional theory has suffered from rather low resonance. Rather than providing a full review<sup>6</sup> of the debates surrounding intersectionality in gender studies, I selectively address the points most pertinent to the endeavour of placing the important theoretical and methodological contribution intersectional scholarship makes into dialogue with the transnational social space and the becoming of subjects within it. To do so, this chapter takes the beginning of explicit theorising of intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological approach in Gender Studies as its starting point. This choice of beginnings may seem arbitrary, as much earlier work, particularly black feminist scholarship critiquing exclusionary effects of feminist sisterhood fantasies, and questioning white middle class feminists' ability to represent and speak for all women, implicitly made intersectional interventions (cf. Lorde 1981; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; hooks 1982; Hull, Scott and Smith 1982; Spelman 1988; Hill Collins 1990). As early as 1851 Sojourner Truth in her famous speech to a women's rights convention repeatedly asks "Ain't I a woman?" to trouble the lack of engagement that the women's rights movement showed her experience as a black woman and former slave. She pointed out how her gender, her class position, as well as her race shaped her identity, which was neither fully accounted for within the narratives of the women's rights movement nor of the anti-slavery move-

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<sup>6</sup> See for instance McCall (2005), Davis (2008), Denis (2008), Berger and Guidroz (2009) or Lutz et al. (2011) for more comprehensive overviews of intersectional theory and research.

ment. The subject position Sojourner Truth claims in her speech challenges any essentialist understanding of “woman” as a category and is constructed in relation to men, black and white, as well as in relation to the white women in the women’s rights movement (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 77). Over a century after Sojourner Truth’s compelling speech bell hooks re-iterates the powerful question “Aint’ I a woman?” to point out how much feminist practice still draws analogies between the struggle for women’s rights and the black civil rights movement as if all women were white and all blacks were men (hooks 1982). It is thus by no means to curtail the importance of pre-intersectional work towards inclusiveness that my engagement with intersectionality in this chapter begins with the coining of intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological concept. Lykke (2010), however, emphasises the productive nature of a common denominator when it comes to discussing, critiquing and further developing conceptual frameworks. She writes:

I sustain the argument that the explicit articulation of the concept in the late 1980s gave voice to a theoretical endeavour that until then had been widespread and outspoken in feminist theorizing, but without the kind of nodal point that a clear conceptualization establishes. I argue that it is important to have a nodal point, that is, a shared framework for the negotiation of the most effective analytical frameworks. The explicit coining of the concept of intersectionality has been productive in this sense. (Lykke 2010: 86)

Even though this thesis is invested in arguments against an overly neat conceptualisation of intersectionality, or of transnationality for that matter, it is in this sense that I understand the coining of the concept as my starting

point: its emergence as a “theoretical endeavour” articulated as intersectional theory.

The coining of the term “intersectionality” is most often attributed to Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989; 1991), who built on earlier analyses by feminists of colour to critique the treatment of race and gender as individual and mutually exclusive categories of analysis leading to the theoretical erasure of black women’s experience: “the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism” (Crenshaw 1989: 140). Intersectionality references an analogy with a road intersection with potential traffic to and from all four directions, colliding at the centre of the intersection that Crenshaw invoked in her seminal article *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*. It intended to illustrate the ways in which the entanglements of sexist and racist discriminations against black women were not accounted for in court rulings, in similar ways as the driver culpable of an accident on an intersection (in the literal sense) is difficult to determine with hindsight (Crenshaw 1989: 149). This critique of single-axis accounts of discrimination is not only applied to court rulings in discrimination cases, but extended to feminist and anti-racist theory and politics more generally. Race and gender become relevant critical lenses only where they exclude and discriminate – one at a time, that is. In other words, Crenshaw discusses how interventions based on a single identity politics intervene beside the point where black women’s experiences of discrimi-

nation are concerned, as they cannot account for experiences involving simultaneous instances of racism, sexism, ableism, homophobia or ageism<sup>7</sup>. The underlying assumption in such linear approaches to discrimination is that, were it not for a person's gender, for instance, or (but never and) for a person's race, no disadvantage would be suffered at all. The point of reference is one of implicit privilege, whiteness, and masculinity/maleness (Crenshaw 1989: 151). Intersectionality thus challenges unidimensional and additive approaches to discrimination and disrupts universalist projects of identity politics. This critique is based on the notion that addition is only possible with untainted entities. To analytically add gender and race, for instance, presupposes that gender is not already racialised and that race is not already gendered (cf. Spelman 1988). It shifts the focus from a universalist understanding of "Woman" to differences between women by challenging white feminists to reflect on different social positionings of women and men, and how they might reproduce some of the power relations at the heart of feminist critique (Lutz et al. 2011: 8). Feminist debate and scholarship on decentring the universalising white, heterosexual, privileged, and mostly western categories of woman and gender has subsequently examined how other markers of social differentiation like nation, age, ethnicity, race, age, disability or class shape, constitute or challenge such understandings of woman and gender (cf. hooks

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<sup>7</sup> In this brief introduction to the history of intersectionality as a theory I purposefully list the -isms Crenshaw has referred to throughout *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex* (cf. p. 151). I will engage more fully with potential pitfalls and possibilities related to (not) explicitly listing any given number axes of difference in chapter four.

1981; Lorde 1981; Spelman 1988; Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992; Crenshaw 1991; Hill Collins 1998). Davis (2011: 45) identifies this fundamental normative and theoretical concern with “the acknowledgement of differences among women” as one of the driving factors of intersectionality as successful feminist theory<sup>8</sup>.

Lykke (2010: 68) has evaluated feminist knowledge production on intersectionality genealogically and distinguishes three clusters of intersectional scholarly work. In addition to explicit theorising on intersectionality, she identifies implicit intersectional theories incorporating an intersectional lens without calling it that or placing it at the centre of attention, and intersectional theorising under other names which do intersectional work while using other concepts as frameworks. While my work concentrates on explicit intersectional theorising, it is important to keep in mind that scholarly efforts to adopt inclusive approaches are neither exclusive to work on intersectionality nor limited to feminist theory. In terms of what intersectionality is and does, and what I intend to do with it, my use of intersectionality is as a theory and research paradigm rather than a specialisation on particular types of contents or subjects (Hancock 2007).

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<sup>8</sup> Addressing a fundamental concern is the first of four factors Davis identifies to evaluate the success of a (feminist) theory. The remaining three are a novel twist to an old problem, in intersectionality's case bringing together classical feminist concerns and postmodern critical methodologies in novel ways; appealing to generalist as well as specialist audiences; and enough ambiguity and incompleteness to foster productive debate and scholarship (Davis 2011).

Like transnationalism, intersectionality has undergone efforts to pin down the terms and conditions under which the concept applies, to determine and prescribe which intersections need to be analysed in which particular ways, and to further develop and legitimise it as a (more) comprehensive theoretical framework. A number of scholars have expressed concern about a lack of concise definitions and prescriptive methodologies for intersectional research (cf. McCall 2005; Denis 2008; Nash 2008; Winker and Degele 2011). In her influential (meta)-analysis of intersectional scholarship, McCall (2005) identifies three clusters of intersectional approaches grouped according to the ways in which they manage the complexity of categories or axes of difference they take into account: Intercategorical, intracategorical, and antecategorical complexity.

Intercategorical complexity uses social categories strategically to research multiple inequalities and discrimination between socially constructed groups. It lends itself mainly to quantitative research questions interested in comparing “relationships among the social groups defined by the entire set of groups constituting each category” (McCall 2005: 1787). An example of such research is the analysis of income inequality disaggregated by predetermined categories of gender, race and class (McCall 2001).

Intracategorial complexity, on the other hand, is concerned with “particular social groups at neglected points of intersection” (McCall, 2005: 1774). Early intersectional scholarship based on the critique of universalising categories by feminists of colour, for instance Crenshaw’s work (1989; 1991), is situated within this cluster. Intracategorical complexity takes a moderately sceptical stance towards categories, is critical of sweeping generalisations such as generalised “Woman” but does not reject the use of categories as such: “The point is not to deny the importance— both material and discursive—of categories but to focus on the process by which they are produced, experienced, reproduced, and resisted in everyday life” (McCall 2005: 1783). In pre-determining intersections that matter, however, such approaches risk falling back on the similarly sweeping generalisations they conceptually set out to critique, i.e. “black woman” instead of the initial “woman”. Thus, due to intracategorical intersectionality’s almost exclusive focus on oppression and marginalised groups, black women have emerged as the “quintessential intersectional subjects” (Nash 2008: 1). The “spectre of the multiply-marginalized black woman” haunts intersectional theory and practice along with the much less often invoked but implicitly ever-present “spectre of the heterosexual white man” (Nash 2008: 11) at the privileged end of the spectrum. Together they are symptomatic of the ways in which much intersectional work neglects how not only oppression but also resistance, negotiations and subversion inform the becoming of subjects along a continuum between the most marginal-

ised and the most privileged. Intracategorical complexity requires conceptually defining a set group of people within which to analyse often similarly pre-determined intersections. For intersectional research on, to use a different example, Latina lesbian women in the United States using intracategorical complexity requires presumptions about who belongs to that group before intersections within the group can be investigated. Even where the social constructedness of the categories woman, Latina, or lesbian is acknowledged, boundary marking decisions are necessary. In dialogue with the transnational social space this would mean remaining confined to defining bound communities or groups of people in terms of ethnicity, cultural background, religious affiliation, migratory status or combinations thereof. A purely intracategorical approach that incorporates transnationality as a category of analysis, might not only pre-suppose that transnationality does indeed matter in a particular context, but also who is “eligible” for such an analysis based on factors that lie outside of the analysis itself. I shall return to the problem of tethering intersectional analyses to “certain specifically marked bodies” (Barad 2001: 98) in chapter four.

An ant categorial approach, finally, allows remaining attentive to the structural critiques in terms of systems of oppression in which intersectional theory originated, while widening the scope to the subject level (Prins 2006). Ant categorial approaches are most concerned with deconstructing catego-

ries of analysis, respectively with denaturalising them and demonstrating the constructed nature of, for instance, gender or sexuality. Anticategorical complexity “was born in this moment of critique, in which hegemonic feminist theorists, poststructuralists, and antiracist theorists almost simultaneously launched assaults on the validity of modern analytical categories in the 1980s” (McCall 2005: 1776). Intersectional scholarship aligned with anticategorical complexity draws critical attention to the boundary marking processes involved in constructing and maintaining social categories in the first place. It is concerned with difference rather than identity, and with the ways in which social categories are firmly embedded in the normative discourses implicated in constructing the subjects of which they speak. Thus,

the premise of this approach is that nothing fits neatly except as a result of imposing a stable and homogenizing order on a more unstable and heterogeneous social reality. Moreover, the deconstruction of master categories is understood as part and parcel of the deconstruction of inequality itself. That is, since symbolic violence and material inequalities are rooted in relationships that are defined by race, class, sexuality, and gender, the project of deconstructing the normative assumptions of these categories contributes to the possibility of positive social change. (McCall 2005: 1777)

McCall situates her own work in the cluster of intercategorical complexity, but notes that “different methodologies produce different kinds of substantive knowledge and that a wider range of methodologies is needed to fully engage with the set of issues and topics falling broadly under the rubric of intersectionality” (McCall 2005: 1774). The reason I re-iterate McCall at length here is thus not to argue that a particular approach to complexity is

necessarily “better” than another, as that depends on the kinds of questions asked, respectively the kinds of knowledge an approach seeks to produce. Yuval-Davis (2011b), for instance, has convincingly argued for an intersectionality situated between inter- and intracategorical complexity in order to supplement macro perspectives on socio-economic power structures with a more intimate politics of belonging to investigate how the chosen categories of analysis co-constitute one another.

In dialogue with the transnational space of chapter two, and in light of the work of queering intersectionality that chapter four engages in, however, I situate this thesis on the nexus between intra- and ant categorial complexity. The multi-layered and hybrid transnational space chapter two has constructed as the field for the dialogue about transnational becomings this thesis stages, as well as the notion that transnational becomings are entangled with/within that space, require the challenges to categorical orderliness that an ant categorial take on intersectionality provides in order to approach the untidy mess (Villa 2011: 173) of transnational becomings. An ant categorial intersectionality furthermore complicates the ways in which categories of analysis tend to “stick” to particular subjects more so than to others. To move beyond binary and discreet categories such as country of origin/country of residence, here/there, or indeed male/female as binary variables, it is, however, by no means necessary (or even necessarily possible) to abandon or decon-

struct categories of analysis entirely. Particularly if the notion of transnationality is to be carried forward (and my discussion of emergence and descent has illustrated a means to productively do so), an anticategorical and intracategorical take on intersectionality need to join forces and counter-balance one another. Chapter four will further engage with the problem of categories of analysis (versus identity categories) in intersectional theory in its queering of intersectionality.

## **Queer invitations**

Scholarship concerned with queer migrations extends the earlier interventions into transnational migration research for not taking gender seriously enough to sexualities and points to underlying heteronormative assumptions (Kosnick 2010; Castro-Varela and Dhawan 2009; Manalansan IV 2006; Luibhéid 2004). On the one hand, feminist scholarship on gender and migration may seem to offer a setting for thinking about sexualities and migration, yet, on the other, that very same research has often reinscribed heteronormativity by conflating sexuality with gender “which in turn is often conflated with women — a triple erasure meaning that only women have sexuality, sexuality is gender, and gender or sexuality is normatively heterosexual” (Luibhéid 2004: 227). Like gender, race, class and other axes of differentiation such as transnationality, sexuality structures all aspects of migration and is

central to the power relations that migrants as well as other participants in transnational spaces continually negotiate<sup>9</sup>. Yet in most migration research, “sexuality and heteronormativity remain ignored, trivialized, derided, or conflated with gender” (Luibhéid 2004: 233). While she explicitly refers to (im)migration scholarship in general, I believe her arguments about the neglect of sexualities, respectively of the implications of heteronormativity, hold true for research in transnational migration in particular as well. Despite a growing body of queer migration scholarship exploring the intersections between sexualities and migration and thus beginning to unmask previously unintelligible queer subjects and narratives (cf. Kosnick 2011; Thing 2010; Cantú 2009; Kuntsman 2009; Manalansan IV 2006; Gopinath 2003), mainstream transnational migration research remains curiously untouched by those insights from the margins.

In queer scholarship, migration or other, heteronormativity is most often used in analyses of its exclusion of non-heterosexual subjects. As Cantú, the pioneering scholar on queer migrations, has pointed out, “migration research is framed by heteronormative assumptions that not only deny the existence of nonheterosexual subjects but also cloak the ways in which sexuality itself influences migratory processes” (Cantú 2009: 21). Here, I thus use the

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<sup>9</sup> Examples Luibhéid (2004: 232-233) discusses to show how heteronormative regimes structure migrants’ lives are the rape of undocumented women by border patrol agents, the exclusion of immigrant lesbian and gay couples from family reunification policies, and immigrant families presumed to have too many poor children.

term in a broader sense. First, heteronormativity not only excludes non-heterosexual subjects, but also regulates those living within its norms and boundaries: “the regulation of gender has always been part of the work of heterosexist normativity” (Butler 2004: 186). A number of queer migrations scholars (e.g. Luibhéid 2008a; Manalansan IV 2006) rightfully emphasise that queer methodologies need not be limited to the study of homosexuality and non-heterosexual subjects. Heteronormative discourses not only exclude non-heterosexual subjects, but regulate those living within its norms and boundaries. Heteronormativity on the one hand makes the social world intelligible to its inhabitants, while, on the other, meaning “is also negotiated in, and emergent from, the mundane social interaction through which each of us makes sense of our own and others’ gendered and sexual lives” (Jackson, 2006: 112). It not only imposes normative sexuality and sexual practice, but also normative ways of life and legitimate forms of relationships (Jackson, 2006: 107, 110). Manalansan (2006: 226), for instance, advocates the reconceptualization of approaches in gender and migration research “not only by including queer people but also by utilizing the tools of queer studies as a way to complicate and re-examine assumptions and concepts that unwittingly reify normative notions of gender and sexuality”. Luibhéid thus calls upon migration scholarship to

analyze how sexuality structures all migration processes and experiences—and how migration regimes and settlement policies contribute

to producing not only those who become variously defined as 'queer', 'deviant', or 'abnormal' but also those who become defined as normative or "normal" within a binary structure intimately tied to racial, gender, class, cultural, and other hierarchies. (Luibhéid 2008a: 171-172)

Applicable to transnational spaces as much as to migratory processes, queer migrations thus open the door to complicating heteronormative assumptions in transnational migration research. By suggesting that queer methodologies need not be limited to the study of queer subjects, but can be used precisely as an instrument to explore how sexuality and normativities play a role in producing not only those constructed as queer but also those who become normalised by the very same discourses. Queer migration scholarship offers an invitation to complicate heteronormative assumptions underlying much theorising and research on gender and transnational migration. Manalansan IV (2006), for instance, shows how normalising assumptions around biological kinship relations, heterosexual marriage and reproduction, and women's natural role as carers structure how migration research unfolds, what kind of questions can be asked, and what answers become (im)possible.

Scholarship on queer migrations' attention to heteronormativity in migration studies can be read within a broader call for the queering of social research, a call "to bring [queer theory's] conceptual and theoretical apparatus to the study of heterosexuality and its relationship to gender and other axes of social difference" (Valocchi 2005: 762), such as transnationality. Similarly, Oswin (2008) extends the argument for adopting queer approaches beyond

the study of non-heterosexual subjects and places to geographical work concerned with queer place and space. Her critique of the notion of queer space, predominantly conceived as lesbian and gay spaces/places, and the ways in which they have been framed and researched, leads her to argue for “a queer approach to space in its stead” (Oswin 2008: 91).

Once we dismiss the presumption that queer theory offers only a focus on ‘queer’ lives and an abstract critique of the heterosexualization of space, we can utilize it to deconstruct the hetero/homo binary and examine sexuality’s deployments in concert with racialized, classed and gendered processes. Queering our analysis thus helps us to position sexuality within multifaceted constellations of power. (Oswin 2008: 100)

Her argument highlights that it is in fact our analysis that is in need of queering rather than the spaces or subjects it refers to. While an intersectional analysis of transnational spaces allows for attention to sexualities as an axis of difference (cf. Kosnick 2011; Weston 2010; Taylor 2009), it does not in itself lead to research that questions the heteronormative assumptions underlying transnational migration research, nor does it necessarily unmask heteronormative discourse where it circulates in transnational spaces and matters in the becoming of subjects. Chapter four explores how the queering of intersectionality, in dialogue with the sustained intersectionalising of transnational theorising and research, might contribute to drawing increased attention to heteronormative underpinnings in both research process and objects of study.

Transnationality in conversation with queer migration scholarship furthermore produces a point of convergence on the nexus between racism and homophobia. The “orientalist constructions of non-Western traditions, coded as inherently homophobic, surface in narratives of migration to produce tales of individual liberation aided by the enlightened Western state” (Kosnick 2011: 127) mirror portrayals of post-migrants as caught between two cultures coded as between tradition and modernity, part of which I have introduced in chapter one, and part of which I shall explore in more depth in chapter five when discussing academic modes of knowledge production that have at times fed into the between two cultures paradigm in relation to the British Asian transnational space. The resonance is particularly salient where queers and women are similarly positioned in progress narratives that presume a trajectory of liberation that coincides with an orientation to Western culture, away from cultural practices that are constructed as inherently more patriarchal and/or more homophobic. In addition, constructions of “queer transgressive subjecthood in general, is also underpinned by a powerful conviction that religious and racial communities are more homophobic than white mainstream queer communities are racist” (Puar 2007: 15; see also Butler 2008). Reading these literatures through one another thus reveals that singular modes of knowledge production are inadequate in capturing the multiple and entangled nature of transnational becomings. While arguably concerned with comparable critical projects – anti-racist, anti-homophobic, or feminist, for in-

stance – they risk reproducing whichever –ism happens to be situated just outside the frame of such an approach. From a postdisciplinary perspective equally concerning are the ways in which critical perspectives are often situated not only in isolation from one another, but even further removed from the mainstreams, in this case transnational migration scholarship, their critique addresses.

### **Concluding remarks**

Intersectional theory as well as queer theory have a great deal to offer when it comes to thinking about and researching the kind of space conceptualised in chapter two as well as the transnational becomings in and through it. McLaren (2002: 79) argues that, to be useful to feminist theory, a conceptualisation of the subject requires analytical and critical engagement with power, and attention to cultural and historical diversity in terms of potential axes of difference such as gender, race, ethnicity, age or physical ability. Scholarship on transnational feminism (cf. Alexander and Mohanty 2010, 1997; Nagar and Swarr 2010; Tambe 2010; Puar 2007, 2002; Mohanty 2003; Grewal and Kaplan 2000, 1994), in turn, has drawn attention to the myriad ways in which transnational spaces are imbued with power relations. Accounting for the multiplicity the understanding of the transnational social space discussed in chapter

two entails requires an approach to knowledge production on transnational becomings that challenges stable identity categories without losing sight of these power relations. It equally requires an approach that does not lose sight of transnationality as “embodied in specific social relations established between specific people, situated in unequivocal localities, at historically determined times” (Guarnizo and Smith 1998: 11), without in turn attaching pre-determined meanings to the precise ways in which transnationality matters, when and where it matters. Transnational becomings, understood as entangled within/with their temporal and spatial context, transnationality as entangled with other differences that matter, the transnational space as “spacet-imematter” (Barad 2007, 2001), as potentially ambivalent and hybrid, evade such pre-determined meanings. As a part of the dialogue between transnationality, intersectionality, and queer theory at the centre of this thesis, this chapter has emphasised the importance of intersectionality in thinking about transnational spaces and introduced queer migration scholarship to the conversation to begin to draw on tentative points of convergence between these critical literatures. Chapter four returns to intersectional theory and places it in dialogue with queer theory.

## **Chapter Four: Queering Intersectionality**

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*"Every single theoretically or politically interesting project of postwar thought has finally had the effect of delegitimizing our space for asking or thinking in detail about the multiple, unstable ways in which people may be like or different from each other."* (Sedgwick 1990: 23)

This chapter is a continuation of the conversation the first two chapters in part I of this thesis have begun to engage transnationality, intersectionality, and queer theory in. While so far transnationality and intersectionality have been at the forefront of the discussion, this chapter takes its cue from the queer migrations literature introduced in chapter three to further think about the role of queering – particularly in relation to intersectionality as a lens through which to engage with transnational becomings. To do so, the chapter begins by outlining what I mean by queering. Next I discuss a few closely related dilemmas intersectionality faces, namely those inherent in lists of intersections that matter, in the stickiness of intersectionality to particular intersectional subjects, in its underlying geometries, and in a conflation of identities

with categories of analysis. The chapter then moves on to show how the queering of intersectionality has the potential to mitigate against these limitations towards a more nuanced and inclusive approach to transnational subjects. My contention is that intersectionality thus queered not only disrupts the reliance on binary variables some of the scholarship discussed in chapter two relies on, but also draws attention to heteronormative assumptions underlying both research on transnationalism and some of the critical interventions I have drawn on.

## **Queering**

In Warner's (1993: xxvi) rendition, queer defines itself against "regimes of the normal", that is "against the normal rather than the heterosexual, and normal includes normal business in the academy." He thus aptly aligns both, the work I put queer to in this chapter in relation to intersectionality, and the postdisciplinary orientation around transnational becomings as an object of study as an unruly orientation that takes my work in queer directions: "To make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things" (Ahmed 2006: 161). My use of queering here does not merely suggest that we pay attention to the queers (although in a minor point I do do that too). I use queer in its questioning and critical incarnation as disruptive of normativities and binary

thinking (Sedgwick 1990; Butler 1993). In this understanding, queer unpacks and challenges binary divisions such as male/female, hetero/homo, public/private, nature/culture or more to the point of this thesis, here/there, material/discursive or British/Asian. Queer is not understood as an additional identity category to be analysed alongside others, but provides a productive critique of identity categories and emphasises normativities as power relations. Queer theory is thus productive precisely because it is not (or need not be) limited to the study of non-heterosexual lives, but critically investigates how such normativities are deployed. Rather than attributing queer to spaces, subjects or methodologies as a quality or characteristic, I use queer as a verb, queering, in its active connotation as a critical practice in theory and research. The queering of conventional methodologies and disciplinary approaches, according to Halberstam, leads to “a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies” (Halberstam 1998: 13). Postdisciplinarity, arguably such a “scavenger methodology”, works to queer the disciplinary logic by approaching transnational becomings differently, while queering, construed as a postdisciplinary practice, operates to disrupt the normative logics this thesis traces through some of the modes of knowledge production by which the transnational subject has been approached (within disciplines). This dual logic behind my use of queering here is rooted in this thesis’ orientation around its object of study, the modes by

which transnational becomings have been and can be encountered scholarly. To queerly orient around an object of study, according to Ahmed, would mean to *disorient* around it, “allowing the oblique to open up another angle on the world” (2006: 172).

In the preface to volume two of his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault refers to his analyses as “an effort to treat sexuality as the correlation of a domain of knowledge, a type of normativity and a mode of relation to the self” (Foucault 1984b: 333). Sexuality is the site where the three modes by which “human beings are made subjects” (Foucault 1982: 777) join forces. It is thus an important site for the becoming of subjects, most obviously in its dimension of heteronormativity (Warner 1993: xi), where a normative heterosexual matrix is elevated to a key reference point for a subject’s cultural intelligibility. Butler furthermore argues that by governing cultural intelligibility, heteronormativity powerfully shapes both, what is situated within and without the norm proper:

being outside the norm is in some sense being defined still in relation to it. To be not quite masculine or not quite feminine is still to be understood exclusively in terms of one’s relationship to the “quite masculine” and the “quite feminine.” (Butler 2004: 42)

In Sedgwick’s foundational terminology, this thesis thus takes a “universalising” stance on heteronormativity in that it is understood to affect “the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities” rather than just sexual mi-

norities (Sedgwick 1990: 1). Social norms<sup>1</sup> around gender and sexuality are constitutive of subjects and produce the materiality of sex to ensure the “consolidation of the heterosexual imperative” (Butler 1993: 2). Normative discourses on gender and sexuality impose compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980), where “the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, but not for that reason fully determining” (Butler 1993: 231), and “norms are what govern ‘intelligible’ life, ‘real’ men and ‘real’ women” (Butler 2004: 206). Performative adherence to these normative ideals of becoming culturally intelligible as man or woman does not take place in isolation but in a context, here the transnational social space, to which to become intelligible. This reiterative performativity of social norms in general and heteronormativity in particular is at the same time what keeps the norm alive and well. It only remains normative because it is performatively (re)produced through

the daily social rituals of bodily life [and] has no independent ontological status, yet it cannot be easily reduced to its instantiations; it is itself (re)produced through its embodiment, through the acts that strive to approximate it, through the idealizations reproduced in and by those acts. (Butler 2004: 48)

The reason heteronormativity deserves attention here, is that while gendered analyses have gradually found their way into the study of transnational spaces, the interconnectedness of gender and sexuality in general, and

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<sup>1</sup> Butler distinguishes gendered norms from rules and the law: “A norm is not the same as a rule, and it is not the same as a law. A norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of normalization. Although a norm may be analytically separable from the practices in which it is embedded, it may also prove to be recalcitrant to any effort to decontextualize its operation. Norms may or may not be explicit, and when they operate as the normalizing principle in social practice, they usually remain implicit, difficult to read, discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects that they produce” (Butler 2004: 41).

the power of heteronormative<sup>2</sup> discourse at work in the becoming of transnational subjects, as well as heteronormative assumptions underlying research on transnational spaces have somehow not been considered to form part of transnational subjects as object of study. It is thus not to give heteronormativity primacy over transnationality, or gender, for instance, but to foreground the potential of a queer approach to remain attentive to normative discourses, heteronormative ones amongst others, that I include it in my discussion of queering – and by remaining attentive to heteronormativity I not only refer to the heteronormativity that permeates the spaces within and through which subjects become, but also the one that permeates the modes of knowledge production that come to bear down on them.

Following Sedgwick's foundational axiom – so beautiful in its simplicity that it might be taken to encompass this thesis in its entirety – that “people are different from each other” (Sedgwick 1990: 22), but that not everyone is different from everyone in the same ways, my use of nonnormative logics here extends beyond the sexual. While, as I have illustrated above, queering does intend to counter heteronormative assumptions in both research and transnational becomings the researcher encounters, queering does not concern itself purely with heteronorms but regards other attachments that circulate in

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<sup>2</sup> In addition, and related to the two ways in which I explicitly put queering to work here, it is worth keeping in mind that “queer describes a sexual as well as political orientation, and that to lose sight of the sexual specificity of queer would also be to ‘overlook’ how compulsory heterosexuality shapes what coheres as given, and the effects of this coherence on those who refuse to be compelled” (Ahmed 2006: 172).

the transnational space in similar ways. Just as, in Sedgwick's example, "sexuality makes up a large share of the self-perceived identity of some people, a small share of others" (1990: 25), different differences that matter are taken to matter differently (and to different extents) in the becoming of different subjects. Sedgwick traces queer across its etymological roots to signify a relational and strange transitivity or acrossness, actively connoted as twisting and transversing motion and defines it as "a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, troublant" (Sedgwick 1994: viii). She furthermore suggests, and this thesis takes her up on this, to "spin [queer] outward along dimensions that can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all: the ways that race, ethnicity, postcolonial nationality criss-cross with these *and other* identity-constituting, identityfracturing discourses" (Sedgwick 1994: 8, original emphasis). The dimensions Sedgwick lists, as well as her insistence on "and other" discourses, are pertinent here. Queering intersectionality and transposing a queer intersectionality across or sideways to knowledge productions on transnational becomings constitute just such an outward spin. The work of queering thus involves reading, thinking and writing across boundaries – both disciplinary ones, and identitarian ones – to trouble, to destabilise, and where necessary to disrupt logics that uncritical-ly/unquestioningly rely on binaries that exclude the "and other" and/or result from disciplinary orientations rather than (dis)orientation around the object of study.

As this section has outlined, my use of queering in general, and in relation to intersectionality in particular, aligns itself with scholars who foreground the anti-normative potential of queer. It is important to acknowledge queer theory's roots in politics, activism, and scholarship around non-normative sexual identity/practice and highlight that both uses are closely related (in this thesis as elsewhere). Jagose (1996) firmly situates queer in its historical context by outlining continuities as well as points of divergence between queer and the gay liberation movement or lesbian feminism, amongst other traditions related to sexualities. Sullivan (2003) furthermore traces queer theory equally to poststructuralist critique and HIV/AIDS activism. Putting queering to work beyond queer subjects, as this thesis does, does not negate the continued importance of a queer scholarship and politics that continues to mobilise around queer as non-heterosexual, or as umbrella term for non-normative sexualities. The queer migrations scholarship chapter one and three have drawn on as an entry point for thinking about the queering of intersectionality in relation to transnational becomings is a case in point here. The same scholarship that has issued explicit calls for the extension of queer work beyond queer subjects (cf. Luibhéid 2008a; Manalansan IV 2006) continues to offer important critical insights on queer migrants and on the broader relationship between borders, migrations and non-normative sexualities. Neither is this decoupling of queer from queer subjects complete. The theorists (Butler 1993; Warner 1993; Sedgwick 1994, 1990; Foucault 1984b) this section

has drawn on to outline a queering practice beyond queer subjects have all also contributed foundational scholarship related specifically to sexualities and sexual norms. In this project queering operates somewhat abstractly as (dis)orientation around an object of study (Ahmed 2006) in terms of an outward spin (Sedgwick 1994) beyond queer subjects, and is positioned as a postdisciplinary practice (see chapters one and eight). At the same time, many of the literatures I draw on throughout the thesis also use queer in ways that tether it to sexualities – as do I in this chapter when I discuss the queering of intersectionality where part of the work that queering does relates specifically to heteronormative assumptions underlying knowledge productions and objects of study (this chapter). I do not see the varied uses of queer as a contradiction, as I do not think of queer as a zero-sum game in which one way of using queer might take queer away from another. Valocchi has outlined a set of five conceptual guidelines that, taken together, reflect what kinds of critical attention a queering move on social research in general, as well as intersectionality in particular, entails:

- (1) queering the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality; (2) taking seriously the nonnormative alignments across these variables; (3) resisting the tendency to essentialize identity or to conflate it with the broad range of gender and sexual practices; (4) broadening an understanding of power to include identity formations as well as other discursive formations; and (5) treating the construction of intersectional subjectivities as both performed and performative. (Valocchi 2005: 766)

While the approach to queering I take here is not as readily pinned down, his five-point plan to queering is a useful reminder of the multiple registers queering can simultaneously operate on. It also illustrates how queering contains both – attention to sexual and gendered norms, and the potential to extend queering to performatively produced subjects and discursive formations that include the “*and other* identity-constituting, identityfracturing discourses” I have quoted Sedgwick (1994: 8) on, as his reference to intersectionality and broader power relations suggest. The intersectional dilemmas, and the queering of intersectionality that the remainder of this chapter engages with oscillate between these registers. Later in the chapter I shall return to the notion of queering and how I put it to work in relation to intersectionality more specifically.

### **Intersectional dilemmas**

Much like transnationalism (see chapter two), intersectionality as a theory as well as a scholarly, political, and activist paradigm is contested terrain (Russo 2009: 309) with varying definitions, scopes and angles, depending on which feminist school of thought is doing the defining and scoping. While chapter three has traced intersectional theorising in order to highlight its potential to incorporate transnationality alongside other differences that matter,

I here engage critically with the shortcomings that lead me to the queering of intersectionality in turn.

Questions around which axes of difference should be considered for intersectional analysis, and whether or not to agree on a conclusive list of categories for analysis have been central to intersectional theory. Quite likely most extensively Lutz and Wenning (2001), while noting that the list might nevertheless not be comprehensive, have identified fourteen specific categories of difference that require intersectional attention: gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nationality, culture, class, health (able-bodiedness), age, sedentarity, property, geographical location, religion (or secularism) and societal development (in terms of modern vs. traditional). Ludvig, on the other hand, problematises this kind of listing: “[intersectionality’s] implications for empirical analysis are, on the one hand, a seemingly insurmountable complexity and, on the other, a fixed notion of differences. This is because the list of differences is endless or even seemingly indefinite” (2006: 246). Both ends of the categorical spectrum – the lack of a finite (check)list of set categories to consider intersectionally, and the potentially diffuse and infinite nature of such a list – have thus been considered weaknesses of intersectional approaches. While perhaps useful in specific contexts, for instance in quantitative research designs or comparative studies framed in terms of intercategorical complexity

(McCall 2005), catalogues of specific differences such as the one Lutz and Wenning (2001) propose raise questions about what is left out of the frame.

Butler (1993) highlights the empirical impossibility of categories conceived as a list of separate and individual entities and shows how they have the opposite effect of the intended one. Instead of offering insights into complexity, analytical categories divert attention from the ways in which they work through one another in/on the subject. She writes, when categories

are considered analytically as discrete, the practical consequence is a continual enumeration, a multiplication that produces an ever-expanding list that effectively separates *that which it purports to connect*, or that seeks to connect through an enumeration which cannot consider the crossroads, in Gloria Anzaldua's sense, where these categories converge, a crossroads that is not a subject, but, rather, the unfulfillable demand to rework convergent signifiers in and through each other. (Butler 1993: 116, my emphasis)

She thus not only argues for an open-ended take on intersectional approaches to the becoming of subjects, but simultaneously highlights the failure of categories at grasping complexity as such. The entangled nature ("in and through each other") of never finished, never complete processes of becoming is at odds with the language of intersectionality, where constant reference to identity categories almost goes without saying. Indeed, writing this thesis I often found myself lacking the language to engage with intersectionality, even critically, without the (over)use of such categorical language. Moving beyond attempts to analytically cast entangled becomings and spaces into

categorical frames that cannot fit them requires querying “how certain categorizations work, what enactments they are performing and what relations they are creating, rather than what they essentially *mean*” (Sedgwick 1990: 27, original emphasis). In this sense, writing about categories need neither result in terminological paralysis nor in an awkward re-inscription of the reliance on identity categories it seeks to disrupt. Butler (1993: 229), discussing the political mobilisation of “queer” as a category, writes that the deconstructive use of categorical terminology, ought “to extend its range, to make us consider at what expense and for what purpose the terms are used, and through what relations of power such categories have been wrought” instead. Elsewhere she suggests that the customary “etc.” or “and so on” at the end of enumerations of potential intersections signifies an embarrassed confession of failure to complete the ambitious task of doing justice to a “situated subject” (Butler 1990: 196). The potential infiniteness of such enumerations as well as a certain desire for closure are thus not only empirical dilemmas but matter on a conceptual level.

Refusing closure on which differences come to matter in transnational becomings, this thesis takes an unembarrassed approach to the obligatory *et cetera*. What Ludvig (2006: 247) terms the “Achilles heel of intersectional approaches” thus becomes a not only a strength but a necessity: “the ‘etc.’ we all know from theoretical, political, and everyday discourses is much underrated.

The analysis of embodiment processes (...) can make quite clear that the etc. is *necessary*" (Villa 2011: 183, original emphasis). Villa likens the "quest for categories" within intersectional theory to a Foucaultian (1978) "will to knowledge". An intersectional lens sharpened by a set of particular categories of analysis, in her view, prevents intersectional analyses from paying attention to the "micropolitics of everyday action" (Villa 2011: 177), potentially rendering them blind to "factual complexity and its normative dimensions to the attention paid to hegemonic norms" (Villa 2011: 177). Conceptually obliterating the "etc." thus only operates to mask intersectional complexities. To determine *a priori* which categories matter and need intersectional attention, at the expense of which others, should therefore not be the question – at least it should not be the theoretical question. Asking how people make sense of their lives, their embodiment and their social settings and what material and discursive practices they draw on to do so and how they produce meaning and cultural intelligibility, are precisely the questions that matter (in both meanings of the word).

Villa (2011: 177) asks whether it might not "make more sense to use the intersectional approach in a processual (...) sense, meaning that we look at how exceedingly complex interactions are gendered, racialised, (hetero-)sexualised, classed"? While I would add an open ended "etc." to her question, the sentiment reflects well how intersectionality is in need of critical in-

terrogation to avoid the pitfalls its strong reliance on identity categorical thinking masks when complex spaces and subjects are the objects of study. Different transnational spaces provide different social, geopolitical, spatial, and temporal contexts for subjects to become in and through. These differences and particularities in the context invariably call for attention to a varying number of categories and their contextually particular material-discursive entanglements. In other words, gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, religion, culture and other points of reference will not always all be of equal relevance and some may in certain contexts not be engaged with at all. To return to Sedgwick's (1990: 22) recognition, people are simply different from one another. To make prior assumptions about which categories of analysis will be useful towards researching transnational subjects in a particular context, or to assume that there is a pool of independent categories to choose an intersectional model from, however, "violates the normative claim of intersectionality that intersections of these categories are more than the sum of their parts" (Hancock 2007: 251). Normative (check)lists of required intersections, or of lines presumed to intersect, thus fail to grasp complexity and run counter to intersectionality's purpose in transgressing unidirectional and additive approaches, not only to marginalisation but equally to the becoming of subjects.

I briefly turn to the analogies through which intersectionality has been imagined, as they offer a fruitful point of entry to thinking intersectionality

differently. Crenshaw illustrates her case for intersectionality by the means of her seminal crossroads analogy:

Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (...) But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm. In these cases the tendency seems to be that no driver is held responsible, no treatment is administered, and the involved parties simply get back in their cars and zoom away. (Crenshaw 1989: 149)

Poststructuralist feminists have since argued against the usefulness of this metaphor and consider it too simplistic and static to grasp the fluidity and complexity through which subjects become (cf. Lykke 2010; Weston 2010; Staunæs and Søndergaard 2011). Imagining complexity in terms of (however many) intersecting roads reveals nothing about “what takes place at the intersections, what is moving, emerging, disappearing or perhaps even changed by the encounter”. On the contrary, “using the image of a crossroads makes it more difficult to conduct an analysis of change, subversion and life as it is lived” (Staunæs and Søndergaard 2011: 50). Barad (2001: 99) similarly argues that “identities are not separable, they do not intersect”.

Whether intersectionality is conceptualised as crossing roads (Crenshaw 1989; 1991) or with the help of more generic references to axes or lines signifying the differences that matter, the analogies such conceptualisations

are based on boil down to the geometrical notion of lines and the points at which they intersect. Barad (2001: 98-99) thus identifies Euclidean geometry as the root of a number of problems that intersectionality faces. In her view, the reliance on, in this case, inadequate science leads to an understanding of gender, race or class as separate and somehow inherent characteristics. To think about what drawing on such linear analogies means and does, a brief look at the underlying science is instructive. Geometry is “a branch of mathematics that deals with the measurement, properties, and relationships of points, lines, angles, surfaces, and solids” and thus can broadly be defined as “the study of properties of given elements that remain invariant under specified transformations”<sup>3</sup>. Such an understanding of geometry is fundamentally based on Euclid’s five axioms for plane geometry that,

1. A straight line segment can be drawn joining any two points;
2. Any straight line segment can be extended indefinitely in a straight line;
3. Given any straight line segment, a circle can be drawn having the segment as radius and one endpoint as center;
4. All right angles are congruent;
5. If two lines are drawn which intersect a third in such a way that the sum of the inner angles on one side is less than two right angles, then the two lines inevitably must intersect each other on that side if extended far enough. (Weisstein 2013)

Re-visiting the Euclidean axioms that all references to lines and their intersections ultimately rely on, reveals a number of issues that render them rather questionable analogies for the critical work intersectional research sets out to accomplish. Lines are mutually exclusive, clear cut entities. Points and

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<sup>3</sup> This definition of geometry is taken from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, accessed on 05.01.2013 at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/geometry>.

angles do not allow for any ambiguity, fluidity and fuzziness, for after all, a point is clearly either situated on a line or it is not. Similarly, circles with a radius (line segment) and a centre point imply a clear inside and outside and don't allow for shifting and situational membership. And finally, the point where two lines join or intersect collapses them into one, i.e. lines intersect in one single point in space. This point of intersection then does not allow for multiple layers or dimensions. Geometrically, a point is unambiguously defined and fixed. And a point does not give any indication of what happens to the individual properties each line might have, let alone of the processes and doings of entanglement involved in the merging of lines into a point. In fact, within this geometrical paradigm, the forming of the point does not allow for thinking of it in processual and entangled terms at all. The intersection remains a black box (cf. Lykke 2011), that cannot be thought of in any other way than, quite simply, a point and position. Barad concludes that “[q]uestions of connectivity, boundary formation and exclusion (topological concerns) must supplement and inform concerns about positionality and location” (Barad 2001: 98). A “flat” conceptualisation of a plane on which lines intersect does not allow for thinking of subject formation as ongoing, fluid and multiple material-discursive entanglements.

Geometry is simultaneously an exact science and an abstraction. While it is questionable whether an exact science can offer much insight into the ra-

ther fuzzy arena of transnational becomings, it is in terms of abstraction that intersectionality draws on geometrical analogies to illustrate its point. Abstractions, including metaphors such as the crossroads analogy, mask certain properties to highlight others for the purpose of clarity and simplicity. In the case of intersectionality, the metaphor of intersecting lines might be particularly ill-chosen in that it seems to mask the very issues intersectional approaches set out to address. While it is not my intention to theorise a new metaphor for intersectionality, thinking of an intersection in its other mathematical definition as the three-dimensional area of overlap between geometric solids rather than as a two-dimensional point of intersection between lines might be useful. Imagining a solid as an abstraction for a category of analysis or identity category instead of a line retains a neat illusion of boundedness around the outer edges, but adds depth to the content of the category that is thought in such a way. Neither does an area of overlap between two or more solids immediately solve the black box problem in the metaphor, but it becomes at least imaginable that something might be going on within it. For one, it would not (usually) consist of one single point into which all intersecting elements (lines) are by definition collapsed. Rather, an area of overlap consists of a multitude of points and can be thought of as productive, as a new shape emerging from the entanglements between and through existing figures. Additionally, while intersecting lines always result in a point, even when lines intersect in three-dimensional space rather than on a two-

dimensional plane, an area of overlap between three-dimensional figures becomes a multi-dimensional space in itself. The goings-on within this new space are then what decoding the black box becomes about.

Ahmed's (2006) work on (queer) orientation problematises the ways in which categories of analysis imagined as lines and being oriented in such linear manner operate to exclude what is out of line or becomes besides the point.

The lines that allow us to find our way, those that are 'in front' of us, also make certain things, and not others, available. What is available is what might reside as a point on this line. When we follow specific lines, some things become reachable and others remain or even become out of reach. Such exclusions – the constitution of a field of unreachable objects – are the indirect consequences of following lines that are before us: we do not have to consciously exclude those things that are not 'on line'. The direction we take excludes things for us, before we even get there. (Ahmed 2006: 14-15)

Only certain objects, not others, thus become available to intersectionally orient oneself around. As much as an intersectional approach defined by a list of intersections raises questions about what is left out of the frame, it raises further questions about how such a frame over-determines who becomes eligible for intersectional analyses in the first place. Barad (2001: 98) concludes from her critique of the linear geometry underlying (undermining?) intersectionality that it leads to a reduction of complexity to the extent that it prevents intersectional approaches from fully addressing the critique at its very core, i.e. that race is not only relevant to people of colour, and that not

only women are affected by gender or that sexuality does not only matter to queers. As a consequence, only the specific (identity) categories deemed to apply to particular subjects are considered, focusing all attention on “certain specifically marked bodies” (Barad 2001: 98). In other words, intersectional approaches risk paying exclusive attention to particular racialised, gendered, sexualised, etc., bodies. To return to the (check)list problem I discuss above, the more succinct the list of lines/intersections deemed to matter, the smaller the potential range of who becomes subject to intersectional analysis.

While the foundational texts on intersectionality as well as much subsequent intersectional theorising and research rightfully revolve around the marginalisation of minority groups faced with multiple oppressions, intersectionality harbours the potential for a broader application to subject formation. Russo (2009: 312) identifies a trend “to embrace intersectionality when it comes to analysing those oppressed by multiple systems of oppression but not when analysing the simultaneous relations of privilege that also shape their own experiences, perspectives, and implicatedness in these systems of power”. She argues for the need to apply intersectional analyses not only to intersecting oppressions, but also to privilege, for instance to whiteness and middle-classness, which often remain the unmarked category of reference (see also Dean 2010).

Crenshaw (1991) further expands on intersectional theory by distinguishing between structural, political and representational dimensions of intersectional analyses. To think about how structural locations play out differently on different intersections, how political interventions such as feminist or antiracist projects might contribute to marginalisation, or how cultural representations along the lines of intersecting axes of difference impact on the discursive practices implicated in becoming of subjects already paves the way for intersectional approaches that go beyond analyses of oppressed minority groups. While Crenshaw's own work is concerned with the specific marginalisation that women of colour face along racialised and gendered lines, she equally notes that other factors, she names class or sexuality, matter just as much. She adds that her "focus on the intersections of race and gender only highlights the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed" (Crenshaw 1991: 1245). It seems clear from her formulation that she did not envisage intersectionality as limited to her own field of interest. Her initial theorising of intersectionality thus already contained the potential to apply an intersectional lens to subject formation (formulated as "multiple grounds of identity") and a variety of social spaces ("how the social world is constructed"). Neither are gender and race thus the only relevant axes of difference for women of colour, nor is intersectionality restricted to women of colour, or to marginalised groups alone. A number of scholars have argued for the inclusion of wholly or partially privi-

leged subjects in intersectional theory (e.g. Nash 2008; Russo 2009; Taylor 2010; Staunæs and Søndergaard 2011)<sup>4</sup>. A nuanced intersectional approach needs to take positions of privilege as well as oppression into account and pay attention to the ways in which the interplay between the two is implicated in the material-discursive entanglements subjects become through. Thinking of intersectionality as a research paradigm rather than a content-specialisation on the exclusion of minorities (Hancock 2007) is a necessary first step towards an intersectional analysis of the becoming of subjects in diverse contexts. It allows for a conceptualisation of intersectionality that does not *a priori* and exclusively attach categories of analysis such as race, gender, or ethnicity to minorities. In this vein Staunæs (2003) suggests that

The use of this concept of intersectionality on a subject level must be followed by a majority-inclusive approach, in which social categories such as ethnicity and gender are not perceived as special minority issues.

The majority-inclusive approach is a Foucaultian approach focusing on how someone becomes un/marked, non/privileged, how these processes are produced, sustained and subverted and how power circulates through them. (Staunæs 2003: 105). When Intersectionality is placed in conversation with transnational becomings, it thus needs to remain “analytically flexible and help us to see the unexpected, and potentially, question the expected”

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<sup>4</sup> See for instance Erel (2012), Sherwood (2009) and Cole and Sabik (2009) for examples of intersectional scholarship that explicitly includes sites of privilege.

(Staunæs and Søndergaard 2011: 51), rather than prescribe what is to be looked for. I am thinking of minor discourses and practices that, like scattered hegemonies (Grewal and Kaplan 1994), do not fit snugly with dominant identity categories like gender, race, or class. Instances in which subcultural belonging, language or online environments, just to name a few, may become contextually and situationally relevant to the becoming of subjects come to mind – as do subjects that do not fit so easily with the gendered and racialised marking of intersections. The commonplace phrase to *expect the unexpected* seems instructive here, to remain open to the particular modes of becoming in a particular space.

Conceiving of transnational becomings as material-discursive entanglements already contains a critique of clear-cut identity categories, whatever they may be. It cannot, however, be the aim to fully deconstruct the use of categories as a way of knowing and of doing politics. Matsuda (1991) has convincingly argued for the importance of asking “the other question”

When I see something that looks racist, I ask, ‘Where is the patriarchy in this?’ When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, ‘Where is the heterosexism in this?’ When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, ‘Where is the class interest in this?’ (Matsuda 1991: 1189)

Asking “the other question” on the one hand foregrounds the basic tenet of intersectional theory to be multi-axial in approach. On the other, it points to the question of what might be missing in such analyses more gener-

ally. As Lykke (2010: 82) notes, questions of what is missing and what needs to be included lead to questions regarding the normativity of intersectional approaches. What an intersectional approach might be missing or might need to include are important questions, yet answering them by the means of an ever-expanding list of specificities to pay attention to risks being beside the point. A comprehensive (check-)list of relevant analytical categories constitutes a return to additive modes of analysis, where “race + gender + sexuality + class = complex identity” (Nash 2008: 6), with however many more addends. By analytically separating out individual categories “as if they were fully separable axes of power” (Butler 1993: 116), intersectional approaches risk replicating the cumulative perspectives on identity categorisation they set out to problematise. Such an “x in one” approach

would reinscribe the fragmented, additive model of oppression and essentialize specific social identities. Instead, the point is to analyse the differential ways in which different social divisions are concretely enmeshed and constructed by each other and how they relate to political and subjective constructions of identities. (Brah 2006: 205)

The problem, from this perspective, is not the reference to categories as such, but to conflate intersections with identities, to conflate the use of analytical categories with identity categories. Puar turns this problem of conflation on its head and contends that “the study of intersectional identities often involves taking imbricated identities apart one by one to see how they influence each other, a process that betrays the founding impulse of intersectionality,

that identities cannot so easily be cleaved" (Puar 2007: 212). In the following section I propose that queering intersectionality, in refusing the conflation of identities/intersections/categories of analysis, works against the picking apart of "imbricated identities" by shifting the focus of intersectional analysis from identities to normativities.

### **Queering intersectionality**

Despite a seeming affinity between intersectionality and queer theory – after all queer and intersectional are both critical interventions and have been used conjunctively before (cf. Bilge 2012; Haschemi et al. 2011; Lutz et al. 2011; Browne and Nash 2010; Taylor 2009; Puar 2007; Eng 2001) – their relationship is far from simple or obvious and "potential parallels remain fraught and disconnected" (Taylor et al. 2011: 2). While both contribute critical epistemologies and pay attention to the multiple and shifting processes at work in subject formation, they are separated by an implicit double erasure. On the one hand, when intersectional theory has catered to sexualities, it has often taken it into account as an additional axis of difference, thus reducing sexuality to sexual orientation or LGBT identities. Queer theory, on the other hand, has been hesitant about taking a self-critical stance towards the privileged whiteness of its theorising (Ferguson 2004; Perez 2005). Additionally, some instances

es of queer theorising have circumvented the “analysis of asymmetrical power relations with its focus on the destabilisation of categories, often negating the privileges and (dis)advantages allowing and denying such inclinations” (Taylor et al. 2011).

Where queer and intersectional have been used in productive dialogue, it has been to highlight the need for queer critiques that do not single out sexualities/normativities to the detriment of attention to racism and vice versa. Queer of colour critique (cf. Douglas et al. 2011; Kuntsman and Miyake 2008; Puar 2007; Gopinath 2005a, 2005b; Perez 2005; Ferguson 2004; Eng 2001; Muñoz 1999; Harper et al. 1997) has been particularly invested in interrogating potential complicities between queer and racism. Enriched by postcolonial scholarship and critical race theory, queer thus becomes “a point of departure for a broad critique that is calibrated to account for the social antagonisms of nationality, race, gender, and class as well as sexuality” (Harper et al. 1997: 3). Intersectionality, from a queer of colour perspective, has the potential “for building spaces and movements that are committed to interrogating gender and sexuality norms, whilst simultaneously identifying, challenging, and countering the overt and embedded forms of racism that shape them” (Douglas et al. 2011: 108). In this sense, queer theory and intersectionality in closer dialogue can provide “control mechanisms for one another” (Dietze et al. 2007: 136; Taylor et al. 2011) towards theoretical interventions and methodol-

ogies that make productive use of the important points of critique both have to offer while avoiding either perspective's blind-spots. Similarly, Haschemi et al. (2011) suggest understanding queer theory and intersectionality as mutually destabilising "corrective methodologies". Queer theory has the potential to undermine binary connotations like male/female, hegemonic/subaltern, or here/there inherent in intersectional (and transnational) approaches' focus on power relations and national frames of reference. Intersectional theory, on the other hand, can point queer theory to multiple, potentially contradictory, and simultaneous positionalities.<sup>5</sup> Queering, in turn, mitigates the risk of intersectional approaches' feeding into neoliberal discourses of diversity mainstreaming (Bilge 2012; Puar 2007). That is,

as long as what is understood as queer is not built upon an exclusive focus on, or privileging of, sexuality within identity/diversity politics. Instead, queer must be understood as a political metaphor without a predetermined referent that serves to challenge institutional forces normalizing and commodifying difference. (Bilge 2012: 23)

The phrase "queer intersectionality" (cf. Lutz et al. 2011) has also been used to simply refer to a need of remedying a perceived absence of sexuality as an additional category of analysis (cf. Lutz et al. 2011; Taylor et al. 2011) in intersectional scholarship. Including LGBT identities in intersectional work, including queer in terms of a non-normative sexual identity, or as an attribute to particular subjects, and as an additional axis of difference marked for inter-

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<sup>5</sup> Valocchi (2005: 766), for instance, suggests that a sociological perspective "theoretically enriches queer theory's understanding of intersectionality by rooting the discursive possibilities of identity construction in the social hierarchies of power resulting from class, race, ethnicity, and gender" and thus grounds queer theory more fully in the social.

sectional attention is certainly possible and has been practiced by intersectional scholars (cf. Hines 2011; Dean 2010; Taylor 2010; Weston 2010). These efforts, however, remain tethered to the conflation of identities with categories of analysis where queer risks figuring as synonymous with LGBT identity or with sexual identities more generally. When including sexuality as an intersectional axis of difference in this sense, the focus on “black women as quintessential intersectional subjects” (Nash 2008: 89), potentially shifts to lesbian women of colour instead, retaining the conflation of a particular kind of identity category (gendered identity, racialised identity, sexual identity, transnational identity) with intersectional categories of analysis. It does not by default, however, provide the tools to pay attention to normativities, such as the heteronormative assumptions structuring much research on transnational subjects as well as the heteronormative discourses circulating within the transnational social space (Desai 2004).

In arguing for the queering of intersectionality, respectively for a queer intersectional approach to transnational becomings, I put the notion of queering to work in three closely related ways: to attend to heteronormative undercurrents in knowledge productions and objects of study; to untether intersectionality from identity categories in favour of doing/becoming/process and thus disrupt checklist-like approaches to differences that matter; and to ex-

tend the *doing* of intersectionality from the subject level (Staunæs 2003) to the level of knowledge productions.

First, and quite simply, the queer in queer intersectional is attentive to heteronormative undercurrents not only in the object of study, but equally in the modes by which knowledge on it is produced. Second, the queering of intersectional approaches also refers to shifting the focus from identity categories (whether to argue for or against them) to the ways in which normativities are deeply implicated in the contextuality of the transnational social space and the material-discursive becoming of transnational subjects. This move from clear-cut identity categories, from identities imagined as intersecting lines, to processes, doings, and becomings is a strategy to prevent intersectionality from turning into “an intersectionalism which objectifies complexity for the sake of order and orderly theory” (Villa 2011: 183, original emphasis). Puar furthermore warns of the (intersectionalist) dangers inherent in encasing difference “within a structural container that simply wishes the messiness of identity into a formulaic grid”. Intersectionality then easily becomes complicit with “the disciplinary apparatus of the state” as “a tool of diversity management and a mantra of liberal multiculturalism” (Puar 2007: 212). When intersectionality is used as an approach to transnational becomings rather than to legal and political mechanisms of exclusion, the focus needs to shift with the object of study. To tease out how the material and discursive practices in-

formed by transnationality, gender, race, or sexuality are entangled in a given temporal and spatial context, it is the black box that takes centre stage in place of linear identities. Queering as a disorienting practice that twists, moves, renders oblique (Ahmed 2006), or transverses and troubles (Sedgwick 1993), when applied to the intersectional model, thus refuses the “flat” understandings of lines that intersect on a plane in favour of multi-dimensional entanglements.

In itself, the suggestion that categories of analysis need not be regarded in terms of linear identities is, of course, not particularly novel. A number of scholars theorising intersectional approaches have indeed disentangled the two (cf. Yuval-Davis 2006; Brah and Phoenix 2004; Staunæs 2003). Categories in intersectional scholarship have thus also been understood not as separate analytical axes of difference, not as identity categories, but as “discursive structures through which people find their bearings” and as produced “in daily interactions between actors in situ and in relation to normative conceptions of in/appropriateness” (Staunæs 2003: 104). To Brah and Phoenix intersectionality furthermore signifies

the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts. The concept emphasizes that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands. (2004: 76)

Their reference to differentiation rather than identities, and the emphasis on the importance of context, highlight that complex intersectionalities are indeed possible. As I hope my discussion of intersectionality in chapter three as well as here has shown, my argument is thus neither that *all* intersectional theory conflates identities with categories, nor that there is no place for an intersectionality that does in fact concern itself with identity categories. I do contend, however, that the dominant incarnation of intersectionality, celebrated as “the most cutting-edge approach to the politics of gender, race, sexual orientation, and class” (Hancock 2011: 3) or “the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies (...) has made so far”, is fraught with its conflation of categories of analysis with (linear) identities, and that due to this conflation its reach has been limited to particular bodies, subjects, and objects of study that are, so to speak, marked for intersectional analysis. Furthermore, a queering move away from identity categories towards (and against) normativities and binary codings of knowledge production alleviates this problem and enables the widening of the scope for intersectional analysis, for instance as I argue here, to the becoming of subjects in transnational spaces. Rather than rejecting or replacing intersectionality based on the shortcomings discussed so far in this chapter, I argue that an intersectional approach remains productive in terms of complicating and adding depth to the ways in which transnational subjects have been approached, particularly in considering

transnationality as one of potentially many (rather than the only) dimensions through which transnational becomings take place.

The third way in which I use queering simultaneously follows from the above, and moves beyond the decoupling from identity categories. Queering unfolds its most disruptive potential in its disorienting (Ahmed 2006) capacity to render oblique what is conventionally, or more comfortably perhaps, thought along straight lines. Queering intersectionality, then, complicates the neat onto-epistemological coziness identity categories may seem to offer and shifts from describing particular intersections back to the power relations, discourses, and practices at work in constructing those categories (and intersections). Importantly, it bridges the slippage between an understanding of the becoming of subjects in terms of material-discursive entanglements and identity categorical thinking that intersectionality tends to tether to. Staunæs suggests attuning the intersectional approach by foregrounding the *doing* of intersectionality. She conceptualises intersectionality as a process and argues “for analysing this ‘doing’ *in situ*, where concrete intersections, hierarchies and elaboration are not predetermined” (Staunæs 2003: 102). This understanding of intersectionality in terms of an active notion of doing requires “examining the details of how the concrete doings and intermingling of categories work in a specific context” (Staunæs 2003: 105). It offers a way of looking at multiple categories as relational, simultaneous and fluid dimensions of

transnational becomings, while foregrounding the importance of the specific context that the object of study is situated in. In Staunæs' definition, intersectionality as doing means "the doing of the relation between categories, the outcome of this doing and how this doing results in either troubled or untroubled subject positions" (Staunæs 2003: 105). Like Valocchi's, who as part of his five guidelines to queering (see above) argues that understanding "intersectional subjectivities as both performed and performative" (Valocchi 2005: 766) already forms integral part of queering, Staunæs' focus lies on the intersectional subject. While she re-calibrates intersectionality on a subject level, and suggests that subjects *do* intersectionality rather than *are* intersectional, I suggest expanding this active notion of doing intersectionality to intersectional modes of producing knowledge as part of a queering move. Translating the doing of intersectionality from subjects to queer intersectional research and theory acknowledges the work that a particular mode of knowledge production does in relation to its object of study. In the doing of queer intersectionality the queer, in particular, operates to trouble not subject positions as such, but the normative assumptions that underlie the approach to the becoming of subjects and what that might do to the outcomes (findings, knowledges) thus produced, as well as, by extension, to the becoming of subjects. It is based on this understanding of the *doing* of queer intersectionality that the case study in part II of this thesis is in close dialogue with the chapters in part I. The case study thus thinks its archive(s) *queerly* through the

ways in which a queer intersectional approach attempts to, somewhat self-consciously, produce knowledge differently.

In reading the literatures this thesis engages with through one another, productive gaps and overlaps seem to lurk around every corner. The literature on queer research methods, or the queering of methodologies in the social sciences, while far from prescribing a particular kind of queer or narrowly defining what counts as method/methodology, seems to nevertheless attach thinking about queer methods to queer research subjects/objects and/or researchers (cf. Browne and Nash 2010; GJSS special issues 5(2), 2008 and 6(1), 2009)<sup>6</sup>. This mapping of queer methodologies onto queer bodies, be that researchers or research subjects, parallels queer migrations scholarship's attachment to queers crossing borders, as well as intersectionality's tether to particularly marked, usually gendered and racialised, bodies. This overlap between a methodological question, a critique that postulates the usefulness of queer beyond queer subjects yet remains attached to the latter, and the conceptual stickiness of intersectionality illustrates why it is not my aim to develop a set of queer intersectional research methods to approach an object of study by. As this chapter has shown, queer operates as a corrective move on intersectionality, resulting in what I call a queer intersectional approach to

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<sup>6</sup> Efforts to (more prescriptively) conceptualise queer methods mirror efforts in transnational migration studies to define transnational research methodologies (cf. Pries 2008; Levitt et al. 2003; *International Migration Review* 2003 special issue 37(3) on Transnational Migration), and methodologies that seek to overcome methodological nationalism in transnational research (cf. Amelina and Faist 2012; *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2012 special issue 35(10) on Methodologies on the Move: The Transnational Turn in Empirical Migration Research).

transnational becomings. The question of adequate research methods needs to respond to the methodological needs of individual objects of study, contexts and research questions a queer intersectional approach may find use in. Prescribing a queer intersectional method is thus not my aim and would sit oddly with a postdisciplinary orientation (or queer disorientation) around an object of study. In this sense, queering is construed as a postdisciplinary practice in itself.

In summary, queering intersectionality not only keeps heteronormative discourses circulating within the object of study in focus, it shifts the intersectional focus from identities to normativities and their underlying power relations as (unstable and open-ended) categories of analysis. This shift allows for the queer intersectional lens to untether itself from *a priori* (intersectionally) marked bodies and subjects that all too readily become the objects of intersectional research. Queering intersectionality, where queering figures as postdisciplinary practice, thus also seeks to disrupt the snug fit between intersectionality and gender studies and related fields. The three ways in which I have put queering to work here are closely related, where one partially follows from the other. After all, an intersectionality that continues to conflate identities with categories of analysis cannot attend to heteronormativity as its concern would lie with sexuality as an identity category, if at all. Queering intersectionality as a (dis)orientation around objects of studies beyond the usual

suspects, in turn, is only enabled by its untethering from identities and pre-marked subjects – not only quintessentially intersectional ones, but other potentially (check)listed ones as well. Chapter eight briefly returns to queering as a postdisciplinary practice and extrapolates the broader implications for both queering and the postdisciplinary perspective this thesis has worked through.

## **Concluding remarks**

Queering as a postdisciplinary practice enables thinking knowledge production sideways, to perform what Sedgwick (1993: 8) has called an outward spin across dimensions that are irreducible to one another. In conclusion, this section draws on queering in its disorienting capacity to disrupt categorical, linear, and disciplinary orderliness and further thinks about how a queered intersectionality spins outward to the transnational space.

While this thesis does not presume transnational spaces to be more heteronormative, or more inherently so, than other social spaces, it does not presume them to be any less so either. Indeed, Desai intimately links heteronormativity to discourses around belonging and cultural nationalism in South Asian diasporic spaces such as the British Asian transnational space that the case study in part II of this thesis will turn to.

Heteronormativity (...) operates as a crucial sign of belonging in diasporas. With gender, heteronormativity functions as a site of cultural authenticity articulated through the discourses of morality, cultural values, and ethnic identity. Thus, heteronormativity functions as a key component of South Asian diasporic cultural nationalisms. (Desai 2004: 30)

Both transnational and queer migration scholarship can be read as interventions into mainstream migration scholarship to complicate the latter by shifting the focus to “contradictions, relationality, and borders as contact zones, and the construction of identities, communities, practices, hegemonies and alternatives linked to local, national, and transnational circuits” (Luibhéid, 2008: 173). Empirical research as well as conceptual work on the transnational space has, where it was concerned with the sexed and gendered subjects at all, conflated gender with binary understandings of women and men, and in doing so contributed to “the very naturalization that the notion of gender is meant to forestall” (Butler 2004: 43). The emphasis has rarely been on how gender impacts on the production of the transnational subject (or transnationality on the gendered subject), but on disaggregating research by gender in terms of a binary variable with the attributes male and female. Heteronormative assumptions in research are thus reinscribed by conflating sexuality with gender leading to the “triple erasure” (Luibhéid 2004: 227) introduced in chapter three where gender = sexuality = women = heterosexual. Such

a restrictive discourse on gender that insists on the binary of man and woman as the exclusive way to understand the gender field performs a regulatory operation of power that naturalizes the hegemonic instance and forecloses the thinkability of its disruption. (Butler 2004: 43)

Scholarship on queer migrations, while primarily concerned with research on queer subjects (thus using queer as an identity category) engaging in cross-border mobility, opens the door to complicating heteronormative assumptions in mainstream migration research. Some queer migrations scholars (cf. Luibhéid 2008; Manalansan IV 2006) have argued that the queering of methodologies need not be limited to the study of queer subjects. This scholarship thus invites a closer dialogue between transnational migration studies, gender studies, and queer theory. As chapter three has shown, while queer migration scholarship opens up space for complicating heteronormative assumptions in migration research (Kosnick, 2011; Cantú 2009; Castro-Varela and Dhawan 2009; Luibhéid, 2008, 2004; Manalansan IV, 2006), mainstream transnational migration research has remained rather untouched by these insights. My project, in spinning outwards by placing queer theory in conversation with intersectionality in relation to transnationality responds to these calls for the queering of migration research, and of social research more generally, “to bring [queer theory’s] conceptual and theoretical apparatus to the study of heterosexuality and heterosexuality’s relationship to gender and other axes of social difference such as class, ethnicity, and race” (Valocchi 2005: 762). My contention in this chapter has been that intersectionality thus

queered disrupts the binary assumptions that transnational migration research relies on. An intersectional approach on the one hand addresses essentially transnationalising tendencies by keeping the lens on transnational becomings wide to include other discourses and power relations that equally circulate in a transnational space, for instance around heteronormativity, gender norms or racialization. On the other, the queering of intersectionality, by the means of attending to binary codings that underly knowledge productions more generally, also counters the here/there binary and thus contributes to addressing the methodological nationalism underlying transnational approaches. In its capacity of disrupting the logics that attach a certain kind of analysis to certain kinds of subjects, be they essentially transnational or marked by particular intersections, queering as disorientation (Ahmed 2006) opens up space for considering how different kinds of subjects potentially become through the same kinds of spaces, and how the same kinds of spaces figure differently in different becomings.

Identifying a set of more or less fixed categories and specific systems of oppression becomes strategically useful when “work[ing] in and against a system built upon the privileges and rights of certain fixed identities and categories and where ‘the natural’ and ‘the given’ can be converted into political actives” in terms of identity politics (Staunæs 2003: 103). In political activism, be it feminist, anti-racist, or anti-homophobic, or on the intersections thereof,

such actionable identity categories provide meaningful tools for anti-discriminatory struggles. In such instances, the power of intersectionality to capture the overlap between multiple discriminations embedded in legal, institutional, social or governance settings (cf. Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Hill Collins 1990, 1998; Brah 2004; Yuval-Davis 2006; Winker and Degele 2011) remains central to political struggles and is far from fully realised, let alone somehow temporally situated in the past. However, where the becoming of subjects and the ways in which meaning is produced through every-day material-discursive entanglements are concerned, identitarian approaches as well as an exclusive focus on oppressions fall short. Multi-layered, complex and potentially shifting material-discursive becomings cannot be adequately encountered by the means of fixed identity categories or a set list of differences marked out for intersectional attention. If, for instance, transnationality in terms of here/there bifocality figures prominently on such a list, research is bound to focus strongly on simultaneous attachments to the places that constitute the figurative places of “origin” and “residence”, to the detriment of other discourses and practices participants in the transnational space draw on to contextually varying degrees to negotiate and perform their subject positions. Intersectionalising the transnational space, as chapter three has argued, is thus but a first step towards an approach to transnational subjects that does not essentially transnationalise them. While applying an intersectional lens on transnational spaces allows for attention to the ways in which other dimensions

sions, such as gender, race, or sexuality, become to matter alongside transnationality, the potential for a reductive conflation between identities and categories of analysis remains. This chapter has thus proposed that queerly shifting the focus from identity categories to normativities, from pre-determined intersections that matter to an open-ended list of dimensions that (may or may not) come to matter in a particular context is a productive way of accounting for the simple yet powerful axiom that “people are different from each other” (Sedgwick 1990: 22) in different ways. A queered intersectionality furthermore challenges binary assumptions behind a research focus on transnational subjects: heteronormative ones as well as those that might reduce transnationality to a binary here/there logic. Thus queered, an intersectional lens on transnational becomings remains attentive to the lingering methodological nationalism that an (intersectionally) transnational lens might otherwise inadvertently reify.

## Part II



## **Chapter Five: The British Asian Transnational Space**

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*"When 'South Asian' defines a field of inquiry, does it create a new knowledge, or does it simply do the work of description?" (Shukla 2001: 568)*

After the conceptual dialogue the chapters in part I of this thesis have engaged in, the illustrative case-study in part II aims at extending this conversation to an example of the subjects and spaces it has been oriented around: the British Asian transnational space. This case study does not primarily aim at contributing to an empirical body of scholarship on South Asians in Britain framed as an ethnic community or as a migrant/post-migrant population. As the focus of this thesis is on a postdisciplinary engagement with scholarly work on transnational spaces, on intersectional theory and on the work queering can do in this context, it would take me beyond the scope of a doctoral thesis to simultaneously attempt a full empirical project. As a consequence, the size and scope of this case study are limited to three representational sites

that allow for a dialogue between the British Asian transnational space and a queer intersectional approach to transnational subjects instead. The archive<sup>1</sup> that my discussion in the following chapters analyses consists of scholarly representations of British South Asians (this chapter), the Channel 4 dramas *Britz* and *Second Generation* (chapter six), and a Tumblr blog called *Bhagyawati* (chapter seven).

Given the broad and rather varied use of the term “case study” across a wide range of disciplines, it is essential to clarify how my postdisciplinary project understands its case study. To think through the role the case study plays for this thesis and how it situates itself within it, Stake’s (1995: 3; see also Thomas 2011) distinction between intrinsic and instrumental case studies is instructive: The aim of intrinsic case studies is to explore as much in-depth knowledge as possible on a particular case for the case’s sake rather than to build theory, make comparisons or generalisations. Instrumental case studies, on the other hand, serve the purpose of accomplishing something other than gaining insights or making claims about the studied case as such. This case study aims at reading a queer intersectional approach through the case of the British Asian transnational space, rather than at making empirical claims about the British Asian transnational space as such, and is thus of instrumen-

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “archive” rather loosely in this case study to designate the materials the analysis draws on, the terms “archive” and “materials” are used interchangeably. The final section of this chapter, where I discuss the methodological underpinnings of the case study explains how these materials were selected.

tal nature, in Stake's (1995) terms. It is important to note that knowledge production is never innocent (cf. Harding 2008; Harding 1991; Haraway 1988), and that a case study, defined in whichever way, is no exception to that rule. The postdisciplinarity this project subscribes to not only applies to the "theoretical creolisation" (Brah 1996: 207) in part I of this thesis, but seeks to extend equal attention to partial and situated (Haraway 1988) knowledge productions here.

While quite broad, Thomas' definition of a case study is useful to outline how this project uses a case study research design because it makes an explicit distinction between subjects and objects of study, and maps the relationship between the two.

Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods. *The case that is the subject of the inquiry* will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame – *an object* – within which the study is conducted and *which the case illuminates* and explicates. (Thomas 2011: 513, emphasis mine)

The subject of research, the case, is understood as a case *of* something else – of the object of study. The subject of study is "an instance of some phenomenon, and the latter (...) comprises the analytical frame" (Thomas 2011: 512), the object "constitutes (...) the analytical frame within which the case is viewed and which the case exemplifies" (Thomas 2011: 515). This distinction between the object and the subject of the case study not only has an impact on

the kinds of knowledge produced, but also on the role that the case as such plays. The subject of this case study is the British Asian transnational space, which serves to discuss a queer intersectional lens on transnational subjects through. The latter figures as the object of study in two ways: it is at once the analytical framework, the lens, through which the subject (the case) is viewed, as well as quite literally the object of study that this case study as well as the thesis as a whole and the dialogue it engenders are oriented around. The role of the queer intersectional approach, as the theoretical “backbone” of the case study, thus transcends the dichotomy between theory testing and theory building to reflect the logic of a thesis that seeks to bring into dialogue and integrate different sets of scholarship rather than produce grand theory. Thus, rather than “applying theory mechanically to empirical objects, or testing theories against empirical reality” the discursive approach adopted in this case study calls for “the articulation and modification of concepts and logics” (Howarth 2000: 139) and thus requires theory to remain sufficiently malleable to allow the subject to converse with the object of study on equal footing.

There is much discussion and some controversy about the possibility of generalisation in case study research (Thomas 2011; Flyvbjerg 2006; Yin 2003; Gomm et al. 2000; Lincoln and Guba 2000; Stake 1995; Donmoyer 1990; Stake 1978). As generalisation, for instance beyond the British South Asian transnational social space, is not my aim here, the intricacies of this debate are mar-

ginal to this project – not least because the debate centres around the question whether and how to generalise from one case to others/many. Note, for instance, how Crenshaw, while theorising intersectionality, which has since been generalised far beyond the context she developed it in, uses the particular experience of marginalisation of African American women as a case study and is careful not to generalise to other racialised and sexualised groups (Crenshaw 1991: 1266). In an instrumental case study that uses the case – the subject of study – to discuss its object through, generalisation in that sense seems somewhat beside the point. If then, as I have proposed, the aim of this thesis is a broader conceptual dialogue, generalisation does not take place on the level of the subject of the case study, but of its object, if at all. On the validity of a case study, which by the same token is highly relevant in order to allow for such knowledge claims, Thomas concludes that rather than being representative, “the essence of selection must rest in the dynamic of the relation between subject and object” (2011: 514). The subject of a case study can be a particularly rich case of local knowledge, an outlier case, or a key case of the object of study (Thomas 2011: 514). I suggest that the British South Asian transnational space provides the latter, or to use Flyvbjerg’s (2006) terminology, a paradigmatic case, for this conversation with a queer intersectional approach to transnational subjects. In identifying such a paradigmatic case “any sort of rule-based criteria” (Flyvbjerg 2006: 232) are suspended and intuition plays a central role. The following section unpacks this intuition by providing

the rationale behind the selection of subject for this case study based on scholarly representations of British South Asians.

## **Introducing the case**

To make a case for my choice of case it is useful to briefly review some literature that has sought to produce what might be termed “objective” knowledge about a people defined as British South Asian. I draw on this sociological and anthropological work alongside poststructurally inclined work in cultural studies, as the different ways in which such literatures make knowledge claims about similar social groups, issues and subjectivities from different angles proves instructive. My point here is not to list characteristics of the British South Asian transnational space that render it the ideal, or most paradigmatic, case to study. Rather, I hope that by engaging with different modes of producing knowledge on bodies, identities and cultural productions, as well as by thinking about the label “British Asian” and its trajectory, the case for the case, so to speak, might just go some way toward making it self.

First, I would like to give the emergence and use of the expression “British Asian” some thought beyond the descriptive use I have put it to so far. In the UK, the term South Asian (as well as the standalone Asian) habitu-

ally refers to populations originating from the Indian subcontinent, thus from the area that today consists of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. As Ballard (1994: 28-29) points out, however, Asian, South Asian alongside national denominators as for example Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi, cannot do the diversity they are often meant to encompass adequate justice. In other words, the heterogeneity within any such demarcation one might choose to work with risks outshining the distinctive value the category may hold in the first place. Ballard (1994: 28) shows how the “Asian” experience in the UK empirically

ranges all the way from Sylheti families in Spitalfields, East-London, crowded together in decaying council tenements and faced by high levels of unemployment and racial harassment, to wealthy East African Gujarati Hindus who have moved into comfortable suburban neighbourhoods where they are courted by senior members of the Conservative Party.

This example explicitly points to diversity in class, economic background, trajectory of migration, regional and national origin, language as well as religious and political affiliation, which, along with gender, generation, nationality or caste, mutually intersect and render terminologies like Asian, South Asian, or British South Asian somewhat fictional. In addition to South Asian diversity, Ahmed and colleagues (2012: 5) note that the British component equally eludes tangible content and, particularly in urban centres, is far from a “mono-cultural and mono-racial ‘British host society’”. According to Brown (2006: 58), however, despite heterogeneity within,

what unifies the diaspora is not just the fact of origin in a particular part of the world, and the assumptions, social structures and cultural patterns migrants often bring with them; but also the sense of being in some way still connected with South Asia as well as belonging to their new homelands.

These two angles on the notion of British South Asian – one highlighting intersectional entanglements far beyond two cultural backgrounds, the other intimately linking its meaning back to the new/old homelands at the heart of, not only the notion of diaspora Brown refers to in the second quote, but also of transnationalism – taken together, begin to speak to the concerns around the production of knowledge on transnational subjects at the centre of this thesis.

In Britain, in particular, South Asians seem to have reclaimed the label from the colonial discourses it originated in: “given the prefix British, it speaks for the complex histories of the South Asian diaspora and the settlement of those in Britain with origins in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and India” (Westwood 1995: 198). Thus, while taking notions of “origin” and “settlement” into account, the emphasis here is shifted to histories, processes and becomings. In an ethnography on Southall, an area in West London where many Punjabis have settled, Baumann (1996) found that young South Asians in particular widen the discourses pertaining to culture or community they grow up with “to include this new, secular, cross-religious, cross-caste, and sometimes political, discourse of an ‘Asian’ identification” (Baumann 1996:

154). His examples to illustrate this post-migrant construction of shared 'Asianness' include the simultaneous use of Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi, originally spoken in distinct geographical regions and related to people of distinct cultural backgrounds, as well as hybrid musical genres such as Bhangra or the Asian Underground (see also chapter six) which gained currency as an expression of a shared Asian aspect to young South Asians identities in the 1990ies. This self-identification with the label is partially based on the labelling as Asian by others, such as white British and Afro-Caribbean groups, the aspiration to form some sort of unity, and the wish to symbolically express and represent such a shared (if partial) cultural understanding to others (Baumann 1996: 155).

In British writing as well as colloquially, the terms Asian, South Asian and British South Asian are to some extent used interchangeably. In my own work, I settle for the composit expression British Asian to make visible the transnational potential of simultaneously belonging to, identifying with or participating in British and South Asian spatiality. It hints at the complex trajectories of migration, subsequent settlement, as well as post-migrant life worlds. Bhattacharjee (1997: 309) points out how, on the one hand, the term signals progressive potential in transcending particular nationalist identifications, while on the other being problematic for its Orientalist connotations

originating in Area Studies as well as the masking of Indian hegemonic tendencies on the subcontinent. Thus, the label South Asian,

as a geographical reference that does not have nation or religion in its root meaning, constructs a highly provisional language, a kind of theory itself, for thinking about how people see themselves as part of broader social formations (Shukla 2001: 553).

It lends itself to politically motivated formations wishing for a broader base, as well as to transnational subjects expressing post-migrant subject positions. To refuse an all too easy binary decomposability into a (hierarchical) western and a non-western component, and to emphasise the impossibility of hyphenated national-ethnic identities in postcolonial contexts, some scholars (Kaur and Kalra 1996; Sayyid 2006) have proposed the term *BrAsian* (or *Br-Asian*) instead, arguing that “BrAsian is not merely a conflation of the British and the Asian, it is not a fusion but is a confusion of the possibility of both terms” (Sayyid 2006: 7). BrAsian is meant to encompass migrations, settlement and post-migrant generations “with links both imagined and material to South Asia” (Kaur and Kalra 1996: 219) as well as “identity formations in the particular locality of Britain, whether it be in their exclusivist or hybridized variations” (Kaur and Kalra 1996: 221). The term is then used by all authors in the volume *A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain* (Sayyid et al. 2006). *BrAsian* has since to limited extents found its way into the vernacular, particularly online. However, I suspect a contemporary flavour for short-forms combined with Twitters 140 character limit on contributions and the practicalities

of online tagging<sup>2</sup> rather than a profounder social critique as driving forces behind that particular choice of terminology. Conceptually as well as methodologically my project sympathises with the blurring of clear-cut boundaries between the British and the Asian. Along with the majority of academic writers, however, I continue to use the terms British South Asian respectively British Asian in my own writing. I do so in the sense that these denominators stress “strategic transnational identifications” (Gopinath 2005b: 196) and thus echo the transnational space my research is situated in and link it to the becoming of transnational subjects.

The British Asian transnational space, is not taken to equal a particular geographic location (i.e. Southall or Tower Hamlets), ethnic or religious community (i.e. Bengali Muslims or Punjabi Sikhs), or census category<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, Puar and Rai (2012) challenge the possibility of community in the ethnic and identitarian sense. They argue,

If we can think of solidarity as the communication of irreducible singularities that are no longer specific (i.e., identitarian) or transcended (by the economy), what fuses one community’s struggles to another’s is the intensity of articulated oppressions, the vibrations of contradictory joys, and the multiple experiences of becoming-other produced through its processes. We are not then speaking of a solidarity across difference, if by difference is meant something like “community identitie” (...) We are speaking of a monstrous experience of solidarity that

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<sup>2</sup> See for instance the occasional use of BrAsian as a Twitter #hashtag, as a tag for Instagram selfies, youtube videos or Tumblr content, all of which require a single word rather than composite expressions for optimal functionality.

<sup>3</sup> The 2011 census featured a “Asian/Asian British” category for ethnic identification that was then broken down into Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese and Other Asian (ONS 2012) thus conflating hybrid with purely national identification. Strikingly, this particular category on the ethnicity scale is the only one that is split up entirely in nationalist rather than ethnic or racial terms.

would be singular and intense and for that very reason multiple (...) and irreducible. (Puar and Rai 2012: 88)

In such an understanding of solidarity as irreducibly heterogeneous “becoming-other”, allegiance to British<sup>4</sup> South Asian might be considered a “monstrous experience of solidarity” despite rather than across the difference(s) encountered within the transnational space. This interpretation of British Asian, in concert with a broad conceptualisation of the transnational social space that is suspicious of any easy mapping of the transnational “community”, as well as an understanding of the transnational subject as material-discursive becoming bears upon the ways in which this case study unfolds.

The transnational becoming of British Asian subjects and its intersections with racialised discourses and class formations need furthermore to be considered within the historicity of earlier colonial and post-colonial discourses surrounding the South Asian presence in Great Britain. Migration between South Asia and Britain predates colonial times and persisted throughout the British Raj, where prior to 1947 it predominantly consisted of colonial administrators' servants accompanying their employers back to Britain, of seamen arriving on merchant ships and staying on, and of affluent Indians migrating for education, professional reasons or adventure (Ghuman 1994; Visram 1986). The late twentieth century, so the story goes, has then seen an

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<sup>4</sup> Puar and Rai's essay (2012) deconstructs narratives of South Asian Americans as “model minority” that do not translate as such to a UK context. Many of the points raised, such as the critique of community solidarity cited here, however retain their relevance across geographical contexts.

increase in migration from the subcontinent as a result of independence as well as the post-war economic growth in Britain (Brown 2006; Ballard 2003; Ballard 1994; Ghuman 1994). Migrants of South Asian origin arriving in Britain during the 1950s and 1960s were predominantly of rural origin with backgrounds in peasant farming and were employed as low-paid industrial workers in so-called unskilled employment at the bottom of the labour market hierarchy (Brah 1996: 21-24; Ballard 1994), and began their migrations in a rather distinct cluster of regions – for instance the Jullundur region in Punjab, Mirpur in Kashmir and Syleth in what became Bangladesh in 1971 (Brown 2006). Post-independence migration was thus closely linked to developments on the UK labour market: “If once the colonies had been a source of cheap raw materials, now they became a source of cheap labour” (Brah 1996: 21-25). To challenge and supplement this dominant narrative of post-war labour shortage as primary driving force (pull factor) behind migration from the former colonies, Hesse and Sayyid (2006) draw attention to the on-going colonial dynamics involved. They critique the separation of nation and Empire, respectively of national race-relations and international relations as masking “British continuities of race, empire and nationalism” (2006: 15) where post-colonial migrations are concerned.

In addition to the on-going labour migration from South Asia, a significant number of refugees of South Asian descent followed after Idi Amin’s

eviction of all Asians from Uganda in 1972 as what Bhachu (1985) has termed “twice migrants”<sup>5</sup>. British immigration legislation has been increasingly restrictive, and has been directed at curbing immigration from the 1960ies onwards (Brown 2006; Menski 1999; Brah 1996). The growth of the South Asian population in Britain since has to a large extent resulted from family reunification, “chain migration” (Ghuman 1994), as well as from subsequent generations born within the UK (Brown 2006; Ballard 1994). It is these subsequent generations of South Asians in the UK that have predominantly been constructed and portrayed as caught between cultures and haunted by “the spectre of ‘the between’” (Alexander 2006: 271). Media and popular culture representations of British Asians have perpetuated the figure of the docile and oppressed British Asian woman and the Muslim fundamentalist British Asian man - and continue to do so. *Britz* and *Second Generation*, the Channel 4 dramas I draw on in chapter one and six, are but two contemporary examples of a multitude of productions that, in different ways, reference stereotypes of British Asians as caught between cultures.

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<sup>5</sup> In contrast to the majority of previous labour migrants, “twice-migrants” were predominantly Gujaratis from urban backgrounds and formed part of an emerging middle class in Uganda (Brah 1996: 33). Migrating for a second time, from Uganda to the UK involved downward social mobility for most.

## **The British Asian in scholarly representations**

Turning to the scholarly representation of British Asians, the purpose of this section is threefold. It continues to further introduce the case, and it illustrates how I read the British Asian transnational space as paradigmatic (Flyvbjerg 2006) for the purpose of discussing a queer intersectional lens. At the same time, however, it is also already part of the case study, as the scholarly literatures I discuss here have become to form part of its archive. I focus on different ways in which British South Asians have been researched and represented – looked at – in scholarly work over time, and prioritise instances that speak to the dialogue in this thesis (and vice versa) in terms of the transnational, the intersectional, and the queer, over comprehensiveness. This section is thus at best partially a literature review, but rather produces its own narrative on various ways of producing knowledge on the British Asian transnational space. I begin with pathologising representations that have victimised women in particular, to then trace accounts that have explicitly represented post-migrants as struggling between two cultures. Drawing on critiques of these literatures, I later turn to alternative scholarly representations that have catered to multi-layered and complex modes of transnational becoming and reflect on how they resonate with the wider dialogue between intersectionality, transnationality and queering this thesis engages in.

Early scholarly accounts, aptly described as "victimology" by Huq (2003: 32), have perpetuated victimising and pathologising narratives on British Asian families in general and women in particular. Wilson's (1978) at the time celebrated monograph *Finding a Voice*, for instance, recounts the lived experiences of suffering of Asian women in Britain. Perhaps inadvertently, through the ways in which it emphasises oppression, misery and struggle, at the expense of any positive accounts of South Asian women's agency, it has done little to counter the status of victimhood "common-sense constructions" (Parmar 1982: 256) ascribed to South Asian women. Its persistent focus on honour and shame, on the quasi-inevitable arranged marriage and on particularly patriarchal Asian family relations has represented Asian families and Asian culture as pathological. Similarly, Bhopal (1999; 1998; 1997a; 1997b) firmly situates Asian women in Britain in a setting determined by arranged marriages, patriarchal family structures and oppressive dowry practices. Cultural and religious practices are, like in Wilson's (1978) account, pathologised and represented as cultural givens that South Asian women have to endure. At its extreme, this scholarly mode of representing Asian women has pitched "traditional" against "independent" (read emancipated, modern and westernised) women. Bhopal's work (1997a: 148; 1997b), for instance, portrays the former as uneducated, embedded in systems of arranged marriage and dowry giving, doing the majority of housework and thus suffering from "private patriarchy" within the households they so seldom leave. The latter, according to

the same studies, are educated, often employed, give up practices such as arranged marriages and dowries, and share housework and control of household finances with their husbands:

'Traditional' South Asian women want to retain the custom of arranged marriages and the partaking of dowries, they want to hold on to these traditions as part of their South Asian identity. 'Independent' South Asian women become highly educated and enter the labour market, they no longer want to have arranged marriages, instead they want to co-habit with their partners." (Bhopal 1997a: 153)

Traditional, in this context, is given clear negative connotations and implies backwardness, a lack of agency and patriarchal oppression (Ahmad 2006: 281). Practices such as arranged marriage and dowries are read, and in turn portrayed, as essentially bad and taken as a measure of just where on the traditional/modern spectrum a woman, a family or indeed an entire "community" might be situated. The ways in which such victimising narratives operate resonate with static visions of culture found in earlier work, for instance in Khan's (1976) ethnography of *Purdah in the British Situation* where the author as a fieldworker set out to become "more Pakistani than a Pakistani girl" (Khan 1976: 242) to observe and report on the practice of Purdah amongst Mirpuri Pakistanis in Bradford. Beyond the ethnographic account, she offers a range of generalisations that represent Asian culture as monolithic and static. Examples include that "Asians do not see the status of men and women as comparable, and thus not in competition or conflict" (Khan 1976: 241) with one another, and that "[t]he individualism and independence so

valued in the West, appears selfish and irresponsible to the Pakistani living in this context" (Khan 1976: 225). Not only did such statements not leave any room for variation and heterogeneity, they also foreclosed potential for change or negotiation of how the context might be navigated at different times by different subjects. As Bhopal (1997a, 1997b) does with arranged marriage and dowry practices two decades later, Khan (1976) portrayed the practice of purdah as a "modernity measure" and pitched uneducated villagers who, in her account, strictly observe purdah rules in Bradford against more educated Pakistanis who strive for settlement in the UK and thus gradually relax observance (Khan 1976: 237). This tendency of representing changing cultural practices in terms of a progressive loosening of patriarchal control organised around the modern/traditional binary is at times intertwined with, and at others conflated with an East/West binary when Westernisation is mobilised as a driving force for (positive) change:

Most of the first generation women, including the new brides arriving from Pakistan, are likely to maintain purdah to some degree. The children of these women, however, are already experiencing some of the pressures of modern urban life and a Western education. However orthodox a girl's home life is, she is also influenced by life at school: mixing with friends who discuss boyfriends, going to the cinema, talking about fashions, etc.; and she is also taught to question and to develop her individuality (Khan 1976: 235).

(...) although pride is felt in the acquisition of a purdah household, it will be increasingly difficult to maintain because the influence of the mass media, the rebelliousness of the younger generation, the importance of female education and other processes associated with 'Westernization' and modernization will be increasingly felt (Khan 1976: 242).

I reproduce these admittedly dated accounts at length here because they illustrate how scholarly representations that victimised South Asian women in Britain almost seamlessly shifted into representations of post-migrant generations as particularly caught between cultures. The first generation (the “new brides”) were portrayed as the rural, the traditional, and hence the archetypical victims of their own traditions. Post-migrant generations, on the other hand, begun to be associated with Westernisation and the modern, the influences of the urban, exposure to western education and media, and the vices of western lifestyles, that, in these representations they almost invariably become confronted with. Terminology such as the “rebelliousness of the younger generation” who is “taught to question and to develop [their] individuality” (Khan 1976: 242, 235) foreshadow the later representations of post-migrants as caught between cultures I turn to in a moment.

Anti-racist and black-feminist scholars have critiqued these victimising accounts of British Asian women early on for their Eurocentrism and cultural essentialism. Parmar (1982), for instance, shifts the focus from a pathological cultural background to a critique of the socio-economic and political structures and ideologies they are embedded in and critically sums up the representational problem with scholarly accounts such as the ones invoked above:

The specific literature on Asian women conceptualizes them as non-working wives and mothers, whose problems are that they do not speak English, hardly ever leave the house, and find British norms and

values ever more threatening as their children become more 'integrated' into the new surroundings. Their lives are limited to the kitchen, the children and the religious rituals, and they are both emotionally and economically dependent upon their husbands. (Parmar 1982: 250)

Additionally, she argues that a sole focus on the plight and hardship British Asian women suffer at the hands of their husbands, families and communities risks "providing further fodder for the liberal racist" whose reading of such work "can all too easily reinforce ideas of Asian men being more sexist than white men and Asian families being particularly barbaric and tyrannical" (Parmar 1982: 252). Later critics have continued to emphasise the racialised, classed, and gendered discourses that underpin representations of British Asian women, families, communities and the practices – particularly those portraying British South Asian women as passive and dependent victims and thus glossing over agency and resistance (Ahmad 2006; Puwar and Raghuram 2003; Dwyer 2000; Puar 1996; Brah 1996; Bhachu 1995; Bhachu 1993). Puar (1996), for example, notes the essentialist understanding of culture that is at work in such pathologising accounts of family life, religious and cultural practice, and argues that it allows a "dominant white gaze to perceive Asianness as more patriarchal" (Puar 1996: 129) than Britishness. In a similar vein, Bhachu critiques the ways in which Asian cultural practices and values have been represented as unchanging and repressive givens, "rather than as values [British Asian women] continuously adapt, choose to accept, reproduce, modify, recreate and elaborate according to the circumstances in which

they are situated" (1993: 100). Ahmad (2006) furthermore highlights how sustained scholarly focus on ethnic communities and the representation of British Asian women in terms of cultural practices tied to the honour and shame complex mark them as ultimately Other:

The interest in arranged marriages, religion, izzat, purdah or veiling (...) are examples where over-arching reductionist frameworks are used to impute meaning to the lives of those studied and to limit the scope of discourse on [British Asian] families. (Ahmad 2006: 288)

Wilson, whose early work (1978) I have framed within an essentialising and pathologising scholarly approach to British Asian women, might be read as a case in point for Ahmad's (2006) concern. Wilson's later work (2007), while no longer solely concerned with the "plight" of Asian women in the UK – and attentive of racism, immigration policy, changing masculinities and representation, amongst other issues – retains a its focus on patriarchal family relations, marriage and notions of honour and shame. Thus, while taking on board earlier critiques of the construction of British Asian women as docile "victims" of their own patriarchal culture, this work continues to frame them by the means of the same practices that pathologising and victimising representations have relied on.

Other scholars (Ghuman 2003; Anwar 2002; Ballard 1994; Anwar 1986) have more explicitly been concerned with post-migrant generations' struggle and/or switching between two cultures. Their accounts resonate with the ear-

lier scholarship on transnationalism, where transnational bifocality was the dominant lens (see chapter two). While here it is two cultures rather than two nation-states that capture scholarly imagination, the two sets of literature proceed in similar ways in reducing the subjects they engage with to their transnationality or two cultural backgrounds respectively. Anwar, for instance, quite literally argues that “the children of Asian parents born or brought up in Britain are a generation caught between two cultures” (Anwar 1986: 51) and portrays them as conflicted between their parental generation, imagined as traditional, and the lifestyles they are confronted with outside of their homes<sup>6</sup>. Ballard (1994: 30-33) compares this notion of switching between two distinct cultural settings to bilingualism, which unlike the popular notion of being torn between two cultures, is rarely constructed as particularly traumatic. He stresses how post-migrants switch back and forth between different sets of cultural codes pertaining to their British educational environment and their Asian family life, while he attributes the potential for struggle post-migrants face to mutually largely negative perception their sets of context have of one another (rather than to essential cultural conflict). Scholarly representations of British Asians as caught between cultures overlap with the victimising and pathologising accounts encountered above where post-migrant women are constructed as *more* caught between cultures than their male contemporaries.

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<sup>6</sup> His later work then retains the notion of in-betweenness but focuses more strongly on bi-cultural lifestyles and synthesis of the “old” and the “new” (Anwar 2002).

Ghuman, in a chapter aptly named *Daughters of Tradition* contends "that South Asian girls are under more stress than boys in coping with their biculturalism" (2003: 182) and goes on to feed into pathologising narratives by attesting young Pakistani and Bangladeshi women with serious psychological tensions resulting from the gender inequality that he attributes to their cultural and working class backgrounds (Ghuman 2003: 168). Ahmad, in contrast, notes the importance of acknowledging gender inequalities and patriarchal oppression without elevating them to a cultural given: "any analysis that relies solely on highlighting gender inequalities within racialised families is in danger of re-enforcing not only stereotypes, but also the racialised inequalities that act to mask diversity within groups and areas of mutual struggle" (Ahmad 2006: 282). Different scholarly representations of British Asians have thus to varying degrees nurtured between cultures narratives in a number of not mutually exclusive ways: by essentialising and pathologising Asian culture, by victimising Asian women, and by literally portraying post-migrants as caught between cultures.

In addition (and related) to the critiques of victimising representations I have invoked above, the between cultures paradigm has undergone scrutiny in its own right. Brah deconstructs it as a caricature of constant torment over identifications – a caricature that "portrays young Asians as disoriented, confused and atomised individuals" (1996: 41). She argues not only that the evi-

dence fails to support such generalised representations, but that due to numerous intersections along the lines of gender, race, class, caste or religion, the assumption of homogeneous and discreet South Asian and British cultures to be caught in between is misplaced (1996: 40-42; see also Puar 1996). These critical interventions have paved the way for scholarly work that is invested in the ways in which British South Asian subject formation draws on a variety of discourses and practices, is contextual and negotiated as well as fluid and hybrid. Essentialist constructions of Asianness and Britishness to be caught between and static identities have thus been challenged, and scholarly attention has to large to large extents shifted to the productive potential that the British Asian transnational space holds for the becoming of subjects. Subsequent empirical research on the British Asian transnational space, then, mirrors the re-conceptualisation of transnationalism from an emphasis on transnational bifocality to “the spaces of transnationality” and “ways of exploring [the] multiplicity of transnational experiences and relations” (Jackson et al. 2004: 1) that chapter two has conceptually traced. Bhachu (1995), for example, finds that ethnic or cultural traditions remain in flux and undergo transformation in a transnational context, taking class and local cultures as well as structural constraints into account. She re-casts British Asian women “as active agents who interpret and reinterpret, formulate and reformulate their identities and their cultural systems in a climate of continuous change” (Bhachu 1995: 239).

Arranged marriage – the ultimate tradition through which British South Asian culture in general and women in particular have been constructed and imagined (Ahmad 2006; Puar 1996) – is reformulated as a malleable practice that is contextually negotiated and adapted rather than a static constant of tradition. Different patterns of arrangement have, for instance, been identified depending on the levels of involvement in partner choice by parents and young people, adding a “modified traditional” marriage where parents select partners and the young person makes a choice, and a “cooperative traditional” marriage where both parents and young people are equally involved in selection and decision making processes (Stopes-Roe and Cochrane 1990: 30). Further investigating such modified narratives on marriage traditions, Pichler (2007) finds that young British Asian women’s engagement with discourses around marriage, dating culture and relationships strongly reference their local context and “intersect with gender and social class as well as with institutional discourses of their school” (2007: 213) to negotiate their belongings. She shows how such negotiations can draw on a wide range of discourses:

The girls tend to position marriage arrangements as a joint family undertaking, but they also engage briefly with notions of romantic love and all insist on ‘knowing their partners’ without aligning themselves with a discourse of premarital dating. The girls’ negotiations also draw on anti-immigration discourses as well as on discourses of cultural incompatibility and imperial Darwinism to support their opposition to men from Bangladesh. (Pichler 2007: 213)

These far from straightforward (re-)negotiations of marriage practices contain trade-offs between the security of belonging to an extended family and social network and instances where young women choose to diverge from the conventions honoured within such networks (Bradby 1999). Similarly, Bhachu (1993) shows how the practice of dowry giving, likewise often represented as a quintessential Asian practice, has in fact flourished and undergone change in the British context. Not only have dowries become more extensive, she finds that their structure and contents have incorporated British regional styles and British consumption patterns to the extent that a “London East Ender” dowry, an “Oxford Street Marks and Spencerish”, or a “Liverpudlian Sikh” dowry are discernable in terms of class, prestige, and sub-cultural/regional style (Bhachu 1993: 107-108).

In the wake of Bhabha’s (1996; 1994) and Hall’s (1990) work on hybridity, British Asian cultural practices and productions such as clothing (Mani 2003; Dwyer 2000; Bhachu 1993) or music (Bakrania 2013; Kim 2012; Murthy 2009; Sharma 2006; Dawson 2005; Huq 2003; Hutnyk 2000; Back 1995) have attracted a great deal of scholarly interest. Like scholarship subscribing to a between-cultures paradigm, this set of literature is particularly interested in post-migrants. Rather than two cultures in binary opposition, however, cultural formations that arise out of the in-between itself are at the centre of attention. While productive in terms of not essentialising and pathologising cul-

ture, as well as allowing for ongoing transformation and synthesis, this approach has received critical attention for its risk of glorifying or romanticising hybridity. In addition to the victimisation of Asian women, the caught-between-two-cultures paradigm, and Marxist celebrations of Asian women as oppressed workers, Puwar (2003) maps this tendency as a fourth “melodramatic moment” (2003: 22) from which academic knowledge production on South Asian women has operated: “Discourses of hybridity, flows, borderlands, ‘becoming minor’, the nomadic, ambivalence are all to be found among the motley crew of concepts that are all too often called upon to narrate alterity as well as the path to alterity” (Puwar 2003: 32). Puwar’s critique, as well as other objections to an all-to-easy conflation of cultural productions (such as hybrid music styles) with identities (Bakrania 2013: 10) resonate with the concerns Guarnizo and Smith (1998) have raised about the “utter fluidity” of theories of hybridity applied to transnational spaces. It is important to keep in mind that hybrid cultural practices, as well as hybridity as a means of becoming transnational is not automatically progressive (Hutnyk 2005; Puwar 2003). Thus, while shifting the focus from transnational bifocality to the transnational space, from two cultures/countries to becoming within/through the transnational space certainly draws on the “third space” (Bhabha 1994) as a productive space (see chapter two), it is not my intention to uncritically celebrate hybrid formations as particularly edgy or transgressive in this case study. Dwyer (2000) points to gendered and classed ways of negotiating hybrid

identities that simultaneously draw on British and Asian backgrounds, as well as Islamic discourses. Her research participants invoke the latter as a means of countering cultural expectations regarding their clothing, education and marriage (Dwyer 2000), as well as to carve out novel Muslim femininities (Dwyer 1999; 2000). While her work emphasises relationality and hybridity in British Asian identities, the ways in which gender, class, religion as well as cultural and national belongings are represented as intertwined, constantly (re-)negotiated, and *simultaneously* relevant to the life-worlds of her research participants, point towards an intersectional analysis. Mirza (2013), in her work on transnational Muslim women in the UK and veiling practice, unpacks the intersections between race, gender, and religion. She finds that her respondents are "caught up in the messy historical and political dynamics of the post-9/11 Islamophobic media discourse and its overwhelming preoccupation with the 'embodied' Muslim women in British public spaces" (Mirza 2013: 13). The hijab figures as a marker of what she terms "embodied intersectionality", where

becoming an intersectionally situated gendered and raced subject of discourse reveals not only the discursive effects of hegemonic power and privilege which 'name' the Muslim woman, but also highlights her embodied agency to consciously rename her identity as lived at the intersecting cross-roads of her transnational journey. (Mirza 2013: 13)

Alexander (2000b) shows how gendered accounts of South Asians have predominantly focussed on women and gender oppression while black and

South Asian masculinities have gone “largely ignored empirically and under-developed theoretically” (Alexander 2000b: 235). Her ethnography of a group of young Bengali men refrains from representing South Asian men as a homogeneous group of patriarchal oppressors and argues for “an account of masculine subjectivities that allow for change, contradiction, division and ambiguity, but also for solidarity and friendship, loyalty and love” (Alexander 2000b: 247). Similarly, Westwood (1995) understands South Asian masculinities as contested and processual, “not as finished products but as gender identities in process, a part of cultural configurations that are the products of resistances, appropriations, and accommodations within specific histories” (Westwood 1995: 209). This understanding of British Asian masculinities as not fixed and therefore inherently fractured and unstable stands in direct opposition to stereotypical views of South Asian men as the Other, as for example in Orientalist notions of the strong and vigorous “‘martial races’ of northern India” or the oppositional “‘wily oriental’ who (...) was actually feminized under the colonial gaze” (Westwood 1995: 211). These accounts of British Asian masculinities as neither monolithic patriarchal oppressors – as some scholarship susceptive to “victimology” (Huq 2003: 32) implies – nor a riot-prone threat to society challenge pathologising discourses and foreshadow post-9/11 critiques of Islamophobic representations of British Asian masculinities as “dangerous brown men” (Bhattacharyya 2008). As this latter body of scholarship illustrates, the welcome turn to negotiation, relationality and hy-

bridity coincides with a shift from a sole focus on women to increased attention to masculinities – particularly Muslim masculinities (Archer 2002; 2001; Alexander 2000a, 2000b; Macey 1999; Jacobson 1997)<sup>7</sup>.

In conversation with the themes that run through this thesis, the different modes of scholarly representation of British Asians I have briefly (and selectively) outlined here speak to the queer intersectional reading of transnational subjects in ways that chapters six and seven hope to explore more extensively. As indicated earlier, the construction of post-migrants as caught between cultures had its counterpart in transnational approaches that reduced transnational subjects to their transnationality. The ongoing emphasis on negotiated identities and hybridity (including calls for caution against the romanticisation of hybridity), on the other hand, resonates with the broader conceptualisation of the transnational space that chapter two aligns itself with. Scholarship on British Asian spaces, subjects and cultural productions also highlights heterogeneity and points to gender, class, race, and religion, amongst other differentiations, along which British Asianness is negotiated and represented. Scholarship critiquing a sole focus on women (Alexander 2000b), cultural essentialism (Dwyer 2000; Puar 1996), or a problematic over-emphasis of Islam (Kalra 2009) might be read as critiques of single issue ap-

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<sup>7</sup> Despite a clear emphasis on complex, multi-layered and hybrid masculinities, however, Kalra worries about the ways in which the increase in scholarly representations of British Asian masculinities could be indicative of and potentially complicit in “the policy terrain marked by ‘home-grown terrorists’, 7/7 and the perceived threat of Islam” (Kalra 2009: 119).

proaches that resonate with the ways in which intersectionality intervened in feminist knowledge productions that privileged gender at the expense of race and other power relations. The diversity along the lines of class, gender, cultural heritage, caste, religion, language, economic background, etc. evident in the empirical scholarship this section has drawn on, juxtaposed with a shared sense of “strategic transnational” (Gopinath 2005b: 196), not only problematises narrowly defined notions of ethnic communities confined to particular geographic locations. It also testifies to the significance of an intersectional analysis that remains open to the “differences that matter” (Ahmed 2004), and thus open to multiple entanglements within the transnational space where they are drawn on to make meaning, rather than by default.

Post-colonial, poststructuralist and feminist interventions (Brah 2006, 1996; Puwar and Raghuram 2003; Puar 1996) have furthermore persuasively unpacked the Eurocentric and Orientalist discourses that facilitate pathologising representations of British Asian families, the victimisation of South Asian women, the othering of South Asian men and women as well as the flawed construction of post-migrant generations as perpetually caught between cultures. With the exception of some scholarship on queer British Asian subjects (Reddy 2005; Kawale 2003; see also Badruddoja 2008 on the US context), the heteronormative assumptions underlying the scholarly representations outlined above have been neglected. Not only has sexuality routinely not been

taken into account alongside other differences, the foregrounding of women, of family life, of marriage and later of masculinities, have kept non-normative alignments outside of the frame. Heteronormativity as a discourse underlying the production of all subjects (as well as most research questions) has received little attention. Kalra, in his discussion of the increased attention to British Asian masculinities, notes a tendency to let masculinities stick to men and femininities to women (Kalra 2009: 119). Gopinath's "queer diasporic logic" (2005b; 2003) is thus far the only approach in this context that advocates queer methodologies on a broader scale to tackle such heteronormative assumptions. Thus, while the scholarly representations of British Asians I have engaged with in this section readily enter into dialogue with the different modes of transnational knowledge production outlined in chapter two, as well as with the benefits of an intersectional lens on transnational subjects, what a *queer* intersectional lens might add to the dialogue and vice versa lies in the conspicuous absence of such palpable equivalents. I by no means argue that the British Asian transnational space is the only possible site through which to discuss a queer intersectional lens (see also chapter eight). What I suggest is, that within the setting of an illustrative/instrumental case study and its particular relationship between object and subject (Thomas 2011) of study it is important to select a case that has the potential to enter into dialogue with the object on a number of productive levels. In mapping the different ways in which knowledges on the British South Asian transnational space have been

produced, and how these scholarly representations resonate with the transnational, the intersectional and the queer critiques the conversation in part I of this thesis is based on, I hope to have demonstrated that if the British Asian transnational space holds that potential in relation to a queer intersectional approach to transnational becomings.

### **Methodological underpinnings of the case study**

While the literature on case studies as a research design (cf. Thomas 2011; Flyvbjerg 2006; Stake 1995) I have briefly drawn on to introduce the second part of this thesis at the outset of this chapter have allowed me to situate my case study as instrumental (Stake 1995) and illustrative (Thomas 2011), and to think through the relationship between its object (a queer intersectional lens) and subject (the British Asian transnational space), these typologies leave open the questions of scope and method that this section seeks to address. Before I go on to describe the methods of analysis used in the case study, I briefly engage with how its archive was constructed.

The selection of the three representational sites this case study analyses has unfolded somewhat organically across the research process. My initial reading of the scholarly representations the previous section draws on, for instance, took place very early on in the project's timeline, at which time I

thought of these texts as a way into the subject of the case study rather than as part of the material the analysis would later engage with. Only through the ongoing work on part I of the thesis did I arrive at the decision to treat this scholarship as both, a way of further introducing and describing the case, and as part of the archive at the same time. This process of reading and re-reading differently forms part of the methods of the case study the remainder of this chapter will outline. Indeed, the preliminary close reading and re-reading of the data frequently emphasised by scholars who describe discursive methods of analysis (LeGreco and Tracy 2009; Talja 1999; Gill 1996) blends into the iterative process of analysis where additional insights and diverging readings of the material can emerge at any stage and may require a rethinking of previous work. Here, this applies equally to the subject and object of the case study, as this shift from introductory reading to part of the material that the scholarly representations in this chapter have undergone illustrates.

The selection of the two Channel 4 dramas *Britz* and *Second Generation* (chapter 6) over other cultural productions that might be read queer intersectionally was based on the instrumental/illustrative nature of this case study. Thus, given the necessary limitations in scope, I have extended similar considerations as Thomas (2011) describes in relation to the choice of case (subject as case *of*) to the selection of the particular materials to analyse in the sense that neither the films nor the Tumblr are meant to constitute “a sample, repre-

sentative of a wider population" but have been selected because they are "interesting or unusual or revealing example[s] through which the lineaments of the object can be refracted" (Thomas 2011: 514). Channel 4's public service mandate in the name of diversity (Houses of Parliament 2003, 2010), a point I return to in chapter six, makes these particular dramas interesting examples through which to explore British Asian representation in contemporary popular culture – not least because they can be read as symptomatic for what Malik (2008: 352) identifies as an "increased focus on 'Asianness' in popular imagination (...) fuelled not just by the 'positive' commodification of a globalized, Bollywood-influenced South Asian popular culture, but also by the 'negative' preoccupation with Islam". They furthermore form revealing examples to place into dialogue with a queer intersectional lens because they allow for both, the paranoid (Sedgwick 2003: 130) reading in chapter one and the queer intersectional one chapter six engages in. The Tumblr *Bhagyawati*, last but not least, was selected for the breadth of content it curates. Initially, my focus was thus on its visual content which I (perhaps too readily) deemed suitable for exploring a queer intersectional reading, again because it simultaneously seemed to portray an (imagined) British Asian space quite literally, and contained a wealth of posts that do not easily offer themselves for classification as either. I saw *Bhagyawati* as a potential instance of self-representation or, rather, self-curation within the British Asian transnational space. In closer engagement with *Bhagyawati*, and read through the theoretical dialogue in part I

of this thesis then, my attention gradually (and often implicitly) shifted to include questions around the knowability of the (blogging) subject and its wider relationship with cybicultural representation. This – with hindsight – dual rationale for having included the Tumblr in my analysis is another illustration of the dialogical and iterative nature of the analysis as such. Chapter seven discusses some of the paradoxes this process has revealed, and chapter eight will return to some limitations the instrumental selection of the Channel 4 dramas and the Tumblr pose.

Due to the textual/visual nature of the materials this case study works with, I use discursive methods to stage the conversation between queer intersectionality and the British Asian transnational space. Discourse analysis, in its most broad definition, aims at describing, understanding, interpreting and evaluating the subject of study under investigation (Howarth 2000: 139). It is about how text is made meaningful through its processes of production and how it, in turn, contributes to the constitution of social realities by producing subjects and meaning. Discourse analysis drawing on Foucault (1981) seeks to scrutinise and disrupt the all-too-familiar by critically interrogating the rules, procedures, and exclusions that shape “the order of discourse”, which underlies the production of knowledge and thus simultaneously constitutes/is constituted by our “will to know” (Foucault 1981). The familiar in this particular case, particularly in my readings of *Britz* and *Second Generation*, are variants of

caught between cultures tropes, and of pathological "common-sense constructions" (Parmar 1982: 256) based on culturalist and otherwise essentialist binaries that (temporarily) mask multiplicity and complexity. In other words, I suggest that the short introductory reading I have given the dramas in chapter one might stand in for the familiar.

When analysing the films at the heart of chapter six, and the Tumblr blog chapter seven my main interest lies in how those representations and curated contents speak to/through/about wider discursive constructions. What I am interested in here is how Foucault's discourse theory can put to work towards my case study on a practical level. Gill (1996: 143) compares this process to walking the tightrope between a "recipe book approach" and "complete mystification" of the methods employed in discourse analysis. Accordingly, my aim here is not to prescribe a new and improved method of discourse analysis. On the contrary, as Howarth (2000: 139) points out, any attempt at "a programmatic statement of the discursive method of analysis" is "incompatible with the philosophical assumptions of this perspective"<sup>8</sup>. Instead, with Foucault in the background, I draw on contemporary scholars who have mapped his discourse theory onto applied research methods. I hope to draw up an itinerary that allows me to let the conversation between

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<sup>8</sup> Foucault himself had an aversion against prescription, stating, "I take care not to dictate how things should be. I try instead to pose problems, to make them active, to display them in such a complexity that they can silence the prophets and lawgivers, all those who speak for others or to others" (Foucault 1994: 288).

the object of study and its subject take centre stage. I predominantly draw on methods of “discourse tracing”, as introduced by LeGreco and Tracy (2009). This approach is particularly useful here because it links methods of discourse analysis to a case study design. While it describes a comprehensive approach to conducting a discursive case study, for my purpose here I primarily draw on what LeGreco and Tracy (2009) define as the data analysis phase and the evaluation of the case study. Furthermore, given the close dialogue that the subject and object of study are placed in, I see analysis and evaluation as less sequential and distinct but as intrinsically linked.

The three steps, adapted from LeGreco and Tracy (2009) I then follow are: posing structured questions to the material, writing the case study, and evaluating the case study. Given that the British Asian transnational space and a queer intersectional approach to transnational subjects have been in close dialogue, these steps are far less distinct than outlining them below might make them appear. For the sake of clarifying my approach, however, it is useful to initially think of them as discreet. In their original overview LeGreco and Tracy (2009) furthermore list data management as a distinct phase. As my case study is instrumental/illustrative (Thomas 2011) with a limited scope and thus does not include large-scale data collections that would require extensive management, as well as due to the dialogical way in which the analysis has unfolded, I have subsumed the practicalities of engag-

ing with the two films and the Tumblr as data where appropriate within the three steps I describe here.

*Structured questions to the data*

The aforementioned close reading of the material consisted of viewing both dramas a number of times, taking notes, returning to working on part I of the thesis, and viewing them again, at later stages. The Tumblr, on the other hand I followed over the period of a year, regularly browsing newly curated content, taking notes and saving hyperlinks to posts that captured my attention for future reference. Drawing on the insights gained from this immersion in the material, and informed by background literature (part of which has since found its way into the case study in form of the scholarly representations discussed in the previous section), I use a set of questions to pose to the archive “in order to systematically ‘lift out’ patterns and arguments” (LeGreco and Tracy 2009: 1532) that enter into dialogue with the transnational and the queer intersectional. These structured questions tease out parallels, connections, nuances as well as contradictions in the archive. Analysing “variability (in other words, differences within and between accounts) and consistency” (Gill 1996: 146) forms the basis to identifying the discourses, discursive formations and discursive practices at work. As Baxter (2003: 8) points out, one

cannot assume that there is simply one discourse determining gender: there may be dominant discourses constructing stereotypical assumptions about masculinity, femininity and binary gender differences, but there may also be resistant or oppositional discourses advocating, for example, gender diversity, inclusion or separatism.

The same extends beyond gender, to other discourses feeding into the becoming of transnational subjects. Structured questions will thus contribute to analysing inconsistencies and contradictions within accounts, identifying regularities and patterns across accounts as well as identifying common assumptions and starting points underlying the material. The result of applying the structured questions to the data is “the systematic linking of descriptions, accounts, and arguments to the viewpoint from which they were produced” (Talja 1999: 467) to recurring discourses, discursive formations and practices. Organising the data according to the structured questions asked from it may also reveal themes and particular sorts of accounts that are marginalised or absent from it altogether (LeGreco and Tracy 2009; Gill 1996). Additionally, the process of developing structured questions makes my researcher role in conducting the case study somewhat transparent. As Gill (1996: 147) points out, “our own discourse as discourse analysts is no less constructed, occasioned and action oriented than the discourse that we are studying”. Turning the questions I pose the material into an integral part of my analysis offers opportunities to make my active role in putting subject and object of study into dialogue with one another explicit.

In practice, the steps taken to pose structured questions to the material differed between the films and the Tumblr<sup>9</sup>. To narrow down the wealth of posts on *Bhagyawati* for further analysis (in a less arbitrary manner than simply focusing on the posts I had noted as particularly interesting), I recorded a screencast of the blog's timeline of the five months between mid-February and mid-July 2014<sup>10</sup>. While the structured questions were informed by my following of the blog for a year, it is this screencasted content in particular that I then took them to in the process of writing the case study (see below). Where *Britz* and *Second Generation* are concerned, the structured questions emerged through the repeated viewing of the films, in conversation with my work on part I of the thesis. They initially took the form notes on questions I encountered in/through the viewing (particularly during initial stages of the project, before any final decisions on which materials to include were taken) to gradually morph into their current form.

#### *Writing the case study*

Once the archive has been read in-depth and exposed to structured questions to identify discourses, discursive formations, discursive practices as well as possible gaps and silences, the next step consists of “translat[ing] the

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<sup>9</sup> The particular structured questions that have guided my readings of *Britz* and *Second Generation*, respectively the Tumblr *Bhagyawati*, are indicated in chapters six and seven respectively.

<sup>10</sup> Downloading the content of an entire Tumblr in bulk is in conflict with Tumblr's terms and conditions of use. A screencast, however, results in a video of viewing a particular set of content, rather than retrieving the content in itself.

resulting raw data into a more accessible narrative" (LeGreco and Tracy 2009: 1535). The task of writing the case study bears strong resemblance to telling a story, indeed, Stake (1995) argues that storytelling is a central process of any case study research design. The case in story-form "can neither be briefly recounted nor summarized in a few main results. The case story is itself the result. It is a 'virtual reality'"<sup>11</sup> (Flyvbjerg 2006: 238). Similarly, Baxter (2003: 6) foregrounds the "fictionalising process of any act of research" and advocates for the researcher to be critically aware that "any act of research comprises a series of authorial choices and textual strategies". The role of researcher as story-teller requires a strong self-reflexive stance (LeGreco and Tracy 2009; Steinke 2005; Baxter 2003), particularly given that not only the immediate story told through the case, but equally the story told through theory and interrogated by the case (subject/object relations) are authored by one and the same researcher. As "the mode of presentation is integrally connected to the justification of arguments made in its name" (Howarth 2000: 141, see also Baxter 2003: 6), viewing the writing of the case study as integral to its analysis rather than an administrative necessity at the end contributes further to transparent and accountable outcomes.

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<sup>11</sup> In a case study that draws on online materials as part of its archive, the phrase "virtual reality" takes on a double meaning – but see chapter seven for a note of caution regarding the separation of the "virtual" and the "real" into all too separate realities.

The analysis of the films in chapter six has directly followed this story-telling-as-analysis approach: Informed by the structured questions, previous viewings, and the work on the queer intersectional lens, the analysis to a large extent took place through the process of writing and re-writing the story the chapter tells. This part of the case study is where it became most evident how enmeshed the three steps of structured questions, writing, and evaluating the case study were in my research practice. For separating out which iteration of viewing and note-taking constituted preparatory immersion in the data, and where the analysis, including the writing of the case study *de facto* began and ended would be as artificial an exercise as discerning at which exact point the discursive themes the films reference turn into structured questions and vice versa – particularly as both emerged in close dialogue with the object of the case study, itself subject to the writing process at the time. Where *Bhagyawati* is concerned, my following of the Tumblr is more readily discernible as preparatory immersion in the material. With the structured questions to guide the analysis, I then took to repeatedly viewing the screencast to code the material in preparation for the story telling as such. In practice, this has resulted in three rounds of pen-and-paper coding. First, I coded every blog entry with one or several one-word code(s) indicative of its content and form, such codes for example included: map, joke, nature, weapons, calligraphy, political, weather, film, Africa, Bollywood, women, personal, school, dress, Middle East, music, photography, India, celebrity, amongst many more. Second, with

the content close by to accompany this round of coding, I grouped these initial codes into a smaller set of codes. Some correspond directly to one of the (more frequently used) initial codes (for example femininity); others retain the name of an initial code but in content collapse several initial codes that were used less frequently and for similar content (current affairs, for example, came to include, election, politics, uprising, conflict, news, and policy). Yet others were given a new label that summarises several initial codes (religion, for example, subsumed Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, devotion, holy scripture and prayer). Third, this set of second level codes was consolidated into the larger aesthetic themes chapter seven refers to: nostalgic feel, multiple femininities, arts/poetics, politics/advocacy, ethnographic gaze, visual geography, and humour/entertainment. Due to the limited scope of the case study I have narrowed down the analysis in chapter seven to the two aesthetic themes that emerged as most persuasive, based on two factors: richness in content (i.e. range of initial/second level codes contributing to the theme's formation, and thus prevalence on the blog); and their immediate relevance to the dialogue between subject and object of study. The two aesthetic themes that chapter seven thus draws on are a nostalgic feel, and multiple femininities. Based on the same criteria, others I might have engaged with more prominently in the process of writing a larger-scale case study include politics/advocacy, arts/poetics, or an ethnographic gaze.

### *Evaluating the case study*

While in developing structured questions and writing the case study, the focus was primarily on its subject, it is in evaluating the case study that the subject is linked back to the object of study. This process requires fleshing out the implications that can be drawn from it as well as how they might be applicable to other contexts (LeGreco and Tracy 2009: 1536). Following from the way in which the case study is situated within the wider project, and from its framing as instrumental rather than intrinsic (Stake 1995; Thomas 2011), the evaluation of the case study forms an integral part of the analysis. As Howarth (2000: 139) points out, “the theoretical framework must be sufficiently ‘open’ and flexible enough to be ‘stretched’ and restructured in the process of application”. The purpose of this step therefore is not only the evaluation of the case study as such, but to draw on the particularities of the analysis of its subject to make claims about the object of study. How does such an approach play out in dialogue with the case? In what instances is their interplay harmonious? In what other instances does the archive talk back? What are the theoretical implications of this conversation for a queer intersectional approach to transnational becomings? What are the limitations of this approach? These “theoretically rich conclusions” (LeGreco and Tracy 2009: 1536) about the object of study, read through the case study, leads to the discussion in

chapter eight where they inform both, the lessons I draw from the case study, and the limitations this project as a whole has encountered.

## Chapter Six: **Queering *Britz* and *Second Generation* Intersectionally**

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*"I'll let you in to a secret Jack, no one has a fucking clue what being Asian means. (...) it's a bogus definition that puts us all in one big brown group which people like you feel comfortable with"* (Sam in *Second Generation*)

### **Viewing *Britz* and *Second Generation* queer-intersectionally**

This chapter returns to *Britz* (Kosminsky 2007) and *Second Generation* (Sen 2003)<sup>1</sup>, the two Channel 4 dramas introduced in chapter one, to explore what a queer intersectional lens might add to the frame. My aim here is thus not to replace or discard that initial reading. The more generous or reparative (Sedgwick 2003; Wiegman 2014) mode of viewing/reading I offer here explores how a queer intersectional approach to the subject matter of the films complicates all too straight forward mappings of Britishness, Asianness, and transnationality onto the films' subjects. My thinking with and through the

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<sup>1</sup> A synopsis for both dramas is attached as Appendix 1.

films, as well as the selection of which particular moments in the films to attend to, is informed by the dialogue between transnationality, intersectionality, and queering in chapters three and four. The structured questions (see chapter five) I have taken to the material in this queer intersectional viewing/reading to guide the conversation between the subject and the object of this case study are: How might the narratives in the dramas escape or transcend the caught between two cultures paradigm? What normativities are at play in the films? How are attachments to British/Asian portrayed? What discourses do those attachments invoke/challenge? What attachments other than those to British/Asian are explored? What discourses do they invoke/challenge in turn?

On the surface, both dramas in their own ways nourish tropes of two distinct and incommensurable cultures to be caught between. Transnational bifocality figures as a source of struggle and angst for the characters involved, an obstacle to overcome – one that can only be overcome by choosing sides. *Second Generation* makes this point through its storyline that represents an either/or choice for its protagonist Heere, who resolves to leave all things British behind, literally, by re-locating to Kolkata with her father, and starting over with love-interest Sam. In spite of her post-migrant positionality that carries the plot insofar as it provides the rationale for her struggle, the finale strongly suggests a *return* to her family after nine years of absence, a *return* to

her Asian heritage, and her boyfriend from adolescence in the end. *Britz* simultaneously drives the choosing of sides home more explicitly and more ambiguously than *Second Generation*. Indeed, its advertisement and tag line “Whose Side Are You On?” (see Figure 1, chapter one) speak volumes to this effect long before the stories of Sohail and Nasima unfold. Ambiguity then comes into play in terms of where their stories lead. While the sides as such are straightforwardly represented by MI5 and its “war on terror” on the one hand, and terrorism on the other, the intricacies and contradictions of choosing sides are what ultimately drives the plot. Notwithstanding these at least initially clear-cut sides, Sohail and Nasima end up in the same place in the final scene – literally and figuratively speaking. Literally, as Nasima pulls the trigger, and the subsequent signal-less flickering screen suggests they both die alongside the musicians and spectators present in Canary Wharf. Figuratively, because the diametrically opposed sides *Britz* starts out with slowly unravel at closer inspection, as this chapter explores. This unravelling emerges organically from plot narration and character development, and reveals the dramas’ internal critique of the limited reading I have given them in chapter one. It is the trajectories of the characters of Heere, Jack and Sam, of Sohail and Nasima that I turn to here. The potential for a queer intersectional reading of *Britz* and *Second Generation* emerges in the entanglements of their journeys. Locating the transnational space in films that nurture binary oppositions between the British and the Asian, and play on their protagonists’ antagonisms

tic positionality between the two, may appear counter-intuitive at first. The closer one pays attention to the dynamics at work in plot and characters, however, the more readily counter-narratives to the dominant motive of cultural struggle seem available.

### **Converging transnationalities**

*Britz* devotes its first of two feature-length episodes to Sohail's story, a tale that in many ways stands for assimilation into British culture and political allegiance to British foreign policy. Sohail's strong allegiance to British law and order are emphasised in a number of ways, leading up to his embracing the British surveillance state by joining MI5. In a classroom scene at university, for instance, Sohail's professor, who is critical of such measures, introduces the topic of control orders in his lecture. He highlights the low threshold for arrest, given that "reasonable grounds for suspecting" any terrorism-related activity are sufficient, and that any suspect could be re-issued a new control order on the same grounds even after successful appeal. Upon the professor's remark that unsurprisingly "most of the legal profession is up in arms" about such legislation, Sohail interjects: "we're talking about extreme cases, right, they'd only do something that drastic if they had a really good reason". He thus stands in defence of the very piece of legislation that should later lead to

Nasima's friend Sabia's suicide. In contrast, Sohail's peers share the professor's scepticism and laugh Sohail's comment off as naïve while showing outrage at such unquestioning allegiance to draconian anti-terror legislation. It is not exclusively Sohail's political allegiance that codes him as British in *Britz*; he explicitly identifies as such in dialogue with his sister Nasima. Both siblings discursively construct their identities in relation to the state, to their memories of being in Britain/Bradford, and where they see space for intervention against racism and Islamophobia. The two episodes of *Britz* are divided between the two discursive positions outlined in this dialogue: Sohail's (initially) strong belief in British law and order, and Nasima's disillusionment with the State's capacity to do its Muslim citizens justice.

S: If the police are detaining people illegally, get a lawyer and use the law to stop them, not your bloody demos... all dressing up like Arabs and blocking up London

N: Is that why you're studying law?

S: No I'm studying law so I can get out of this dump and get a life that isn't just prayers and eating chapatis!

N: You're turning into such a Brit big brother

S: I am a Brit, I was born here and so were you!

N: You sound like you're proud of it

S: Why shouldn't I be proud of my country?

N: What's London doing to you? Because it's a police state, because we're Bush's poodle, because we're slaughtering Muslims all over the world

S: Then get out of the ghetto and get involved - Do what I do... Nas, intelligent Muslims are just the shot in the arm this country needs

N: My earliest memory's of them bricking our window and throwing shit through our letterbox. Last thing I want to be is British.

Sohail not only repeatedly and explicitly rejects Asianness, but is coded as British through his association with cosmopolitan London, predominantly white peers and acquaintances, politics and career choice, and positioned in opposition to Asian Bradford ("the ghetto"), the Asian friends he grew up with and his sister's politics. It is then precisely his apparent choice of cosmopolitan Britishness – not least represented by a postgraduate degree at LSE as his cover story to conceal his involvement with the security service – that gradually, and seemingly despite himself, muddles clear-cut discursive belongings in *Britz* and resurfaces transnationality differently.

The modalities of his new job soon make clear that his legitimacy at work depends on his becoming more rather than less Asian. It transpires that his Asianness is what makes him valuable, what (in the eyes of his employers) enables him to access intelligence on his friends and neighbours in Bradford; as the plot of Sohail's story revolves around identifying a missing terrorist cell connected to the 7/7 London bombings. The film portrays MI5 as an ambiguously transnational environment – a point most pertinently driven home when Sohail is shown around the building to acquaint him with the various departments his work as a desk officer will require him to liaise with. The phone-tapping department (Figure 2) is shown as populated by a large number of Asian women, one of whom promptly welcomes Sohail in Urdu and tells him how good it is "to see a friendly face".



Figure 2 - *Britz* still, MI5 phone tapping department

In Sohail's first meeting on the job, he then listens to the profiling of the British suicide bomber – a profile of the homegrown terrorist that might to a large extent just as well refer to his own biography:

Who is the British suicide bomber? (...) He's a second generation Pakistani. Almost certainly. He's educated, possibly highly educated, born here, reared here, iPod owning, ManUnited supporting – in many ways culturally indistinguishable from you and me. He has experienced racism in his youth. (...) He's confused about his identity – neither at home in the land of his fathers nor properly accepted as British here.

While the presenter culturally likens the British suicide bomber to "you and me", it is clear that the well-educated second generation Pakistani who is caught between two cultures from the (racial) profile is seen as decidedly more like Sohail than the white presenter with the Scottish accent and the remaining, exclusively white British, colleagues at the meeting table. The viewer is presented with a pensive Sohail, the screens in the background depicting

explosions in a war zone to emphasise the presenter's words for dramatic effect. His position as a MI5 recruit is juxtaposed with the profile of the suicide bomber that, for the intents and purposes of the presentation depicted in the scene, he could just as well be(come). The transnational space this scene references infuses both potentialities with meaning and the means of becoming.

His matter-of-fact indifference is contrasted with his co-workers' and superiors' expressed concern, interwoven with suspicion, over his feelings *as a British Asian*. This is illustrated for instance when Sohail is asked to inform on people in his wider friendship group, or when he is flown to an illegal detention centre to question a victim of torture in Urdu, and his colleagues ask him in a tell-tale tone whether he would be *all right* with these practices. His transnationality is presumed – and increasingly takes hold in him. The deeper his involvement with all that is represented as British in *Britz*, the more entangled the British, the Asian, and the transnational become. At the same time, Sohail's politics gradually shift from unquestioning defence of the surveillance state, as represented in the earlier dialogue with Nasima and the scene at university described above, to a more ambiguous positionality that takes institutional racism, state violence, and injustice against British Muslim citizens into account. Following a scene, for instance, where he is arrested along with his friends/surveillance subjects (the lines between the two are increasingly blurred), supposedly on the grounds of drunk driving – grounds

that shift seamlessly to the terrorism act once they reach the police station – in what can only be described as violent harassment by police forces, he is shown in a (so-far uncharacteristic) frustrated outburst that directly links such racist and abusive police behaviour to the radicalisation of British Muslims. The shift exemplified by this scene intimately links Sohail's character development within the drama to the profiling of the British suicide bomber encountered earlier. Sohail's politicisation, respectively what might on the one hand be read as a gradual approximation of his politics to Nasima's, can no longer easily be disentangled from what might on the other be read as internalisation of the narrative around the British Muslim who is radicalised through the experience of racism. As the plot unfolds, Sohail plays a lead role in tracing a terrorist cell believed to be dormant since the events of 7/7. After the security service (misguidedly) celebrates the mission accomplished, he continues his investigation based on fragile evidence from a voice recording (as we later find out it features Nasima and her contact Matloob), which culminates in his solo effort to prevent the imminent attack and leads to his reunion with Nasima in Canary Wharf.

Nasima on the other hand is politicised in opposition to the British state from the outset of the drama, as is clear from the conversation quoted above. As much as Sohail embraces it, she rejects Britishness, as she feels that Britain has only thrown adversities such as institutional racism at her. The se-

cond episode of *Britz* retells the same story from her point of view. As with Sohail's story, the intricacies lie in the ways in which that trajectory unfolds, in "the meanwhile" of her life that Sohail – and the viewer after the first episode – is oblivious to while pursuing his ambitions with the security service. Nasima is portrayed as increasingly isolated and disillusioned; and as she runs out of options to challenge the status quo, jihadist discourse begins to resonate with her. She does not become more religious or less secular in the process, and thus defies the stereotype of the Muslim fundamentalist. Not only is she not portrayed as particularly devout, she also stands by her black British boyfriend Jude, and remains involved in her medical studies, her friendships, particularly with Sabia, and her social justice activism. As Sohail comes to realise belatedly, if the security service profile of the British suicide bomber had not been so decidedly masculinised, it would have described his sister to even greater extent than it describes himself – after all the presentation quoted above continues with a rather apt description of Nasima's politicisation:

He's tempted by the wealth and material comfort the West has to offer, but racked with guilt as a result of that temptation. Just continuing to live here feels like a betrayal. A betrayal compounded by the war he watches us conducting against his brothers all over the Islamic world. He feels powerless, angry, impotent. Above all he is seeking – seeking a community of the faithful, a band of brothers which represent purity, integrity and a return to honour. Seeking a cause which will allow him to recover his dignity and escape the dreary reality of his daily life. And now he thinks he has found that cause... jihad. Study him... this is your enemy.

Transnationality in *Britz* is a process for both Sohail and Nasima. Their trajectories, while arguably starting out at opposing ends of the spectrum, each require negotiations, allegiances and compromise and begin to converge when Sohail is confronted with the fact that it is his Asianness that allows him to follow his path of Britishness, and Nasima turns to jihad as a result of her personal trajectory, without ever making religion or belonging central to that choice.

Tellingly then, the jihadist training camp Nasima joins in Pakistan is represented as intrinsically transnational – as transnational perhaps as the security service turns out to become in Sohail's story. Her primary contact upon arrival and throughout her training, seemingly one of the leaders of the camp, is Laure, a Marlboro Red smoking woman in European clothing with a French accent. Aisha, the second female trainee at the camp turns out to be British Asian from Southall, London. The camp is set in an architecturally traditional building in an urban area in Pakistan. While the daily routine on camp is portrayed as very simple and devout, such a representation is dislocated when, in passing, a control room is revealed to contain the latest networking and computing technology, thus emphasising the transnationality and connectivity of camp as well as organisation. The still in Figure 3 shows the brief glimpse Nasima (in the foreground) gets of the highly networked operation she is becoming a part of. In terms of the social relations at the camp in gen-

eral, and representations of women's agency and equality in particular, the camp is portrayed as more egalitarian and empowering than the British Asian space the drama maps on to Bradford, which is represented as bound to tradition and family life in ways that paradoxically lock it firmly in the Asian/Muslim realm of caught between cultures discourse (recall Sohail derogatively dubbing it "the ghetto").



Figure 3 - *Britz* still, high-tech control room

It is thus in the respective trajectories of both Nasima and Sohail that the transnational space re-emerges – despite its initial rejection from diametrically opposed discursive positions. This re-emergence does not rely on an inherent transnational bifocality, but happens through a space that facilitates both of their becomings in related ways. On a narrative level, *Britz* is unable to articulate transnational becomings in terms other than binary opposition and struggle; neither of the protagonists is shown to reconcile their identities,

nor does the finale allow for celebratory hybrid figurations of Britishness and Asianness. Yet simultaneously, *Britz* exceeds its own discursive trajectory and hints at alternative becomings in and through the transnational space. While Nasima's and Sohail's political and life choices are situated on opposing ends of the (imaginary?) spectrum between the British police state and a jihadist organisation, and their subject positions are portrayed as equally opposed in terms of identifying as British versus identifying as Asian Muslim, their trajectories discursively converge throughout the film(s). Significantly, the transnationality, that both reject so vehemently from the outset, turns out to have facilitated both of their subject positions in not entirely dissimilar ways. Not only do they ultimately find themselves together in the same place, but their respective becomings rely on the transnational space outside of the realm of binary oppositions in ways that the articulation of the plot as such is unable to trace. Puar and Rai (2004: 90) highlight the "necessary and panicked sliding between a fixed explanatory framework (that manages the crisis of monstrous terrorism) and a transnational, hypertechnologized, shifting terror network" and its productivity of knowledges and transnational subjects alike. The tag line "Whose Side Are You On?" unravels when the sides, represented by Sohail's investment in the security state's efforts to manage "monstruous terrorism", and by Nasima's joining of a terrorist cell, slide into transnational entanglements that refuse to take clear cut sides but produce (coun-

ter)terrorist subjects across and through what may never have been a side to begin with.

It is telling in terms of a queer intersectional reading that the narrative arc of the drama on the one hand follows the script of associating British Asian Muslims with fundamentalism and terrorism, thus further reifying negative culturalist representations, while, on the other, creatively disrupting some of these very narratives in the process. One mechanism this unsettling takes place through is the ambiguous discursive construction of gender in relation to race/ethnicity/religion and transnationality in *Britz*. Nasima's story simultaneously relies on repressive common sense constructions of Islam and of Muslim women all the while troubling such narratives by the means of the very same plot lines. This mechanism is illustrated here by drawing on three moments in the drama that disrupt discursive alignments between British Asianness, Islam, terrorism/the war on terror, and gender. The three examples foreground transnational entanglements in different ways, yet all point to complexities that a singular approach, whether transnational, gendered or focused on religion would fail to capture.

First, I turn to instances in *Britz* where the nexus between gender and religion is explicitly addressed, namely to two consecutive meetings of the Islamic society at Nasima's university. In spite of practiced gender segregation

(male and female participants are separated by a curtain dividing the room in two, with the speaker standing at the front of the room and thus in view of, and able to see both sides), it is here that gender equality is thematised, and women's (gendered) worth as members of society (as well as in jihad) is emphasised. Nasima's hesitant presence at the meetings, at first, feeds into the trope of the Muslim woman as oppressed victim and Islam as oppressive of women. After being asked to name the one thing troubling her most in Islam, she stands up and says: "That's easy. The way men use it to hold women back, to deny us our rights. Women have no voice at all in Islam today". She thus embodies a populist brand of feminist discourse, which polemically argues that misogyny and gendered oppression are inherent to Islam (cf. Eltahawy 2012; Hirsi Ali 2006). In popular discourse, as in *Britz*, such narratives claim authenticity and legitimacy through the Muslim background of its loudest voices. While *Britz* does not give feminist perspectives critical of such gendered Islamophobia (cf. Mahmood 2005; Abu-Lughod 2001) an explicit voice on the topic, the audience is nevertheless presented with a counter-narrative to Islam as inherently sexist. Sexual difference is positively singled out when the radical speaker at the university's Islamic society praises the benefits of female jihadists:

Better than anyone, women are able to land mortal blows on the enemy. They can travel where a man cannot. They can enter buildings without arousing suspicion in a way a man cannot, and they can con-

ceal in a way a man cannot. Yusuf Al-Qaradawi<sup>2</sup> himself has issued a fatwa, stating that it is a woman's duty to seek jihad, even without the permission of her husband. (Britz 2007)

Nasima's oppositional participation in these group meetings, the ways in which they, as the spectator gradually discovers, challenge her strong belief in secular politics and the democratic process, all the while believing that she is the one challenging Islamist politics' gendered exclusions, serve to deconstruct simplistic readings of religion, radicalisation, and secularism. Read alongside Nasima's reluctant fundamentalism, a point I shall return to, the narratives presented through the meetings simultaneously gesture towards the problematic construction of women in terrorism as "the smarter bomb" (Berko 2012), and a critique of discursive constructions that would have Islam be inherently sexist and Muslim women lacking in agency.

This thread of critique is carried through the second example I now turn to, while the angle shifts from the context of political Islam to Nasima's family. Seemingly in an attempt at honesty and openness with her family, Nasima confesses to her father that she is in a romantic/sexual relationship with her black British boyfriend Jude. We see her father erupt in anger and disappointment – portrayed as the archetypal patriarch determined to keep his daughter in line. As a consequence of this episode, Nasima, accompanied by her mother, is flown to her family's home in Pakistan where she is under

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<sup>2</sup> While Yusuf Al-Qaradawi exists in "real life" as an Islamic public figure, scholar and chairman of the International Union for Muslim Scholars, neither the "truth-value" of the fatwa mentioned in this quote (i.e. whether or not he indeed issued such a fatwa), nor the contents and contestations of his politics are of any concern to this thesis.

close supervision by the extended family and introduced to prospective husbands. While everything suggests that she will be forced into marriage as a result of her transgressions into a “Westernised” lifestyle, it later turns out that this was in fact the intended outcome from Nasima’s point of view. We learn that she had carefully staged the interaction with her father, aware that he would send her to Pakistan as a result. Playing the dutiful daughter, Nasima meets with a prospective match and, by sweetly suggesting that this would allow them to get to know each other better, convinces her family to let him take her to an Internet café so she can check her e-mail and confirm her arrival in Pakistan to her person of contact with the cell she has been in negotiation with. She thus uses her (not so) forced stay in Pakistan as a cover story to meet a contact in a nearby city with whom she finalises her decision to join the training camp. She cedes all of her personal belongings, which are then used to stage her death: The woman Sohail identifies as his dead sister at the beginning of the film wears the clothing she was last seen in by her family, as well as a necklace that Sohail recognises as belonging to Nasima (a present from Jude).

This plot twist strongly relies on an audience already familiar, and ready to buy in to tropes of the patriarchal Asian family, forced marriage, and the victimised Asian woman. Both examples outlined so far, thus play on gendered and racialised modes of engaging with the British Asian other that

draw on widely available discourses on oppressive cultural norms ascribed to Asian families, to be intelligible to the audience. The discursive constructions of British Asian women as submissive victims, of British Asian families as patriarchal and traditional, of post-migrant generations as caught between cultures thus function as commonsensical prerequisites for the plot. For without such a common understanding that *Britz* can rely on, the plot twist which reveals Nasima's agency in cleverly manipulating her family into taking her exactly where she needed to be would have been unintelligible. It is only because arranged and forced marriage are so readily conflated in public imaginaries, and because a daughter being sent off to Pakistan to save the family honour by marrying her off are narratives that are widely available, that her cover story can be credible, not only to her friends and family in *Britz*, but equally to a wider British audience. At the same time, however, the familiar narrative is turned on its head when we learn that rather than being the victim of parental control and coercion, it is Nasima's agency instead that had been driving the plot all along. While it is clear from the context that she is by no means unconstrained in her actions, indeed that her decision to join the jihad is fraught with lack of power and political paralysis, her agency remains significant in its undermining of the assumed self-evidence of the representation of patriarchal and coercive British Asian families. This example further illustrates how the reading I offer in this chapter does not erase, but complement and complicate, the ways in which *Britz* nurtures problematic between

cultures narratives. Widening the interpretive frame in conversation with the theorisation of the transnational space as porous rather than bifocally confined draws attention to the multiple layers at work in the becoming of Nasima. The development of her character illustrates how identities gradually unravel and merge. It is, for example, not so much that the narrative of “patriarchal Asianness” disappears or is somehow “proven” wrong at closer inspection, but that it does not keep the last word. Nasima draws on her transnationality and her understanding of her cultural context, in ways that do not confine her to the role that the narrative seemed to have earmarked for her. In playing the context she is presented with(in), she simultaneously invokes norms around gender, sexuality, religion, culture, and racism – for not only does she have a sexual relationship with Jude, Jude also happens to be black, which seemingly exacerbates her transgression – and bends them to her own situational requirements. Her becoming is not, however, restricted to such identity categories, but intricately linked to her political disillusionment, to her compassion for Sabia and to her feeling of isolation from her surroundings. She never fully inhabits a particular subject position made up of any given number of differentiations she momentarily draws upon – particularly not those she draws on instrumentally. It is thus not by adding transnationality to gender, race, or religion that Nasima becomes, but through all of those categories to varying degrees at different times, as well as through other dis-

courses that infuse her personal context, such as the jihad and the war on terror.

The third moment in which *Britz* foregrounds gender in ambiguous ways unfolds around Nasima's subsequent training to become a Shahida (a female martyr) in Pakistan, and is located in the ways in which gender is portrayed at the training camp, as well as Nasima's agency in her commitment to the cause. It works towards further problematising straightforward mappings of gendered inequality onto Islam by shedding a different light on a particular fundamentalist context. The narrative introduced through the passage quoted when discussing the ambiguous reference to women's particular value to jihad, retains its relevance here. In contrast, Nasima's status as a woman at the camp remains predominantly implicit. Life at the camp and the training are portrayed as egalitarian in that all participants live communally, undergo the same training, and eat and pray together – gender is constructed as a non-issue in a meritocratic context. This egalitarian narrative is briefly disrupted when, during weapons training, Nasima excels at assembling a rifle at speed – an activity that is coded as masculine – so much so that she is encouraged to demonstrate her skill blindfolded and praised in front of the group upon success. The spectator is left to wonder whether an added layer to that praise might nevertheless be gendered in its implicit scolding of the male trainees for being slower than *a woman*. This remains, however, the only instance

where Nasima's gender becomes salient in a scene centred on her group of trainees. In her timid friendship with Aisha, for instance, transnationality and the loss of a loved one, rather than gender, are foregrounded as a common denominator. As training progresses, then, the narrative returns to the particularity of women as potential suicide bombers: "they can conceal in a way a man cannot". What the speaker alluded to earlier in the film becomes evident when Laure helps Nasima and Aisha to try on custom made pregnancy costumes designed to conceal a bomb in a textile womb, and learn how to move in them like a pregnant woman.

In contrast to the first example, where the entanglements of gender and religion are made explicit through Nasima's intervention and the ensuing dialogue, her presence and interactions at the camp more subtly troubles discursive constructions of Islam and Muslim fundamentalism as essentially patriarchal and oppressive. I shall return to the (queer) figure of the female suicide bomber in more detail in a moment. For the time being, suffice it to say that Nasima's becoming Shahida as narrated in *Britz* conveys an egalitarian image of terrorism, a tentatively human face of jihad, and accords agency to Nasima/the figure of the suicide bomber. Arguably, however, despite the portrayal of the camp as transnational, and the fact that not all members are coded as British Asian, Asian, or Pakistani (Laure, for instance), the narrative remains attached to the discursive link between British Asians, Islamist terrorism – not

least through the placement of the camp in Pakistan, through Nasima's story and its links to Britain, and through Aisha's presence in the plot. The discourse of the homegrown terrorist first encountered in the profiling of the British suicide bomber discussed earlier in this chapter is thus carried through the second episode of *Britz* through Nasima and Aisha's becoming Shahida.

### **Transnational Underground?**

Despite its setting in a context quite different from *Britz* in that leisure cultures and romantic entanglements take centre stage rather than sombre entanglements of (counter)terrorism, comparable discursive ruptures around transnationality take place in *Second Generation*. The transnational space that is not one, again by virtue of the drama's protagonists being defined by the perpetual struggle between cultures, emerges in unexpected ways and turns out to be much more central to holding the plot together than my initial reading acknowledged. Shifting the focus from the development of the plot to the places – where the characters interact, meet, and meet again, to places that facilitate the narrative of *Second Generation* – draws attention to the British Asian music scene that both Sam and Jack are professionally involved in. In addition to being frequent club-goers, Sam is a founding member of the record label Monsoon, and Jack is a music journalist interested in that same scene. What fig-

ures in *Second Generation* transnational space of sorts is what has been labelled the – not particularly underground (Murthy 2009, Banerjea 2000) – “Asian Underground”. The genre uniquely fuses and re-mixes Bollywood soundtracks, classical tabla and sitar elements, Qawwali and other South Asian vocals, with electronic sounds such as drum and bass, downtempo, break beats and dubstep (Saha 2011; Murthy 2009). On the one hand the British Asian music scene holds the plot together in that the protagonists, a number of secondary characters, the club as a setting for the plot, other settings such as Monsoon’s offices or the recording studio are directly related to it. Additionally, the soundtrack to *Second Generation* is composed by Nitin Sawhney, one of the leading artists ascribed – if reluctantly (Bakrania 2013: 49) – to the Asian Underground. The soundtrack in general, as well as the title piece performed by Sam’s protégé Uzi<sup>3</sup> at a number of instances throughout the film in particular, is firmly situated within the Asian Underground genre. While the Asian Underground has been described as a predominantly middle class phenomenon (Bakrania 2013; Sharma 2006; Banerjea 2000), *Second Generation* folds a working class dimension into its rendition of it. Uzi is portrayed as seeking commercial success to leave his working class background in East London behind, while Sam might be read as the middle class benefactor who hopes to make that happen. Cultural practices, such as music, in this case the Asian

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<sup>3</sup> The track later featured as *Uzis Rap* by Nitin Sawhney feat. UK Apache on the BBC Radio compilation *Bobby Friction and Nihal present*.

Underground genre, “provide critical tools to critique one-dimensional notions of ‘Britishness’ and ‘Asianness’” (Kim 2012: 557) and “disrupt notions of purity and origins” (Sharma 2006: 318). In *Second Generation*, music figures precisely as such a tool and provides the point of convergence through remix and hybrid club cultures that stand for the British Asian transnational space in the drama<sup>4</sup>. In other words, transnational hybridity is expressed through music, while the protagonists’ experiences are portrayed as caught between cultures. By the time *Second Generation* was first aired in 2003, the Asian Underground as a scene and somewhat distinct genre had already been in decline for some years after its apex in 1999 (Bakrania 2013: 189). In a way then, the film revives its hybridising potential and retells a version of its brief history. The plot line centred on the record label Monsoon, discussions around its “authenticity”, Sam’s ethical investment in promoting new talent and doing right by the artists, and his business partner Parv’s economically driven ambitions resulting in “selling out” to the larger label Zenon, are somewhat reminiscent of the rise and fall of Outcaste Records, a small Asian Underground label founded in the mid 90s that signed Nitin Sawhney as its first artist.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> While in this chapter I highlight the hybridising potential of the Asian Underground due to the role it plays in *Second Generation*, it is worth noting that a number of scholars have critiqued such a reception. Murthy (2009) questions the British Asian locality of a global music scene, Banerjea (2000: 65) calls the Asian Underground “a sanitized encounter with an imagined Asian ‘other’”, and Sharma et al. warn against the celebration of hybridity and worry about exoticising, orientalist and othering tendencies in knowledge production on British Asian cultural productions (Sharma et al. 1996: 1-2).

<sup>5</sup> For more extensive work on the Asian Underground see Huq’s (2003) discussion of representations of British Asian musical sub-cultures, and Bakrania’s (2013) rich ethnography of the scene, including its demise in the early 2000s (2012: 187-193).

It is not merely through the soundtrack and music-driven plot elements that the transnational space (musically) emerges throughout *Second Generation*. The space created through the musical métissage permeates the plot in ways that, again, escape the narrative arc that negates the transnational becoming of its protagonists by means of emphasising the either/or they are confronted with throughout the film. Not surprisingly then, Heere is at first portrayed as a reluctant participant in the scene, her presence in it a mere courtesy to her fiancé Jack, and her interaction with it oppositional, as the scene outlined in chapter one, where she mocks her all-too-easily assumed belonging, shows. As the plot develops, she joins Sam at the turntables of the launch party for Monsoon's take-over deal, a party she joins spontaneously with Sam rather than accompanying Jack who is there professionally. This transition, while playing an arguably minor role in the plot development, is symbolic of her becoming in and through the British Asian transnational space as imagined in the drama. She becomes a participant, perhaps despite herself, without ceding to being defined by transnationality. Additionally, the Asian Underground soundtrack stands in contrast to occasions in the plot that portray tradition and religion, where the background music invariably shifts to Indian classical and/or devotional music, thus emphasising tradition, and essentialising culture. Examples include the puja in honour of Heere's father after his return from the hospital, the funeral of Sam's father, or the flashback scenes where Mr. Sharma hallucinates about his deceased wife Sonali. Music

thus also stands as a reminder of Asian traditionality, of what is at stake in the characters' struggles, and of what the transnationality the "Soundz of the Asian Underground"<sup>6</sup> remix and destabilise. This point seeps in to the plot of *Second Generation* in the scenes following Mr. Kahn's passing. Sam's elder brother Firoz is reminiscently listening to their late father's record collection of Ghazals, and when about to turn the music off upon Sam's arrival, Sam asks him to "leave it on". At times, the relationship between the Asian Underground genre as representation of the transnational space and the plot's articulation seems fleeting, a kind of previous overlay, and at others more immediately embedded in the narrative. This scene is an example of the latter, where Sam figures as a mediator between the two layers.

He is then the one who inherits Mr. Khan's record collection, which on the one hand follows logically from the plot as it is he who has use for them in terms of his work as a DJ and producer, and on the other emphasises his position as the go-between, as the one who creates anew from them, as the one who hybridises and sustains the transnational space created through his music. Sam thus plays a double role – quite straightforwardly as a protagonist of the drama at hand, and figuratively as the producer of the transnational space through Asian Underground music – a role that embodies the timid dialogue between the narration of the plot and its attachment to between cultures dis-

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<sup>6</sup> "Anokha - Soundz of the Asian Underground" is the title of an Asian Underground compilation released in 1997 by Talvin Singh, founder of the *Anokha* club night in the mid-nineties, and another big name related to the genre.

course on the one hand, and the production of the British Asian transnational space through hybrid cultural productions on the other.

The multi-layered and provisional space created through the soundtrack and the role music plays in the plot is not an uncontested one. The ways in which it is visualised in *Second Generation* suggest broad participation – not only by the protagonists in their different and sometimes conflicted relations with that space, but also by performing artists shown at the club, by Uzi on his quest for commercial success, by the label Monsoon as producers of British Asian artists, by the British label Zenon who want to buy in, and not least by club-goers (by far not limited to British Asians) who enjoy taking part in the music and the vibe of the scene. Jack figures as an interesting participant from that perspective. Among the protagonists he is the only white British person directly involved in the transnational space produced through musical hybridity. He not only takes part through his relationship with Heere, but professionally through his journalistic work on British Asian productions and club scenes, and as a music enthusiast in his own right. On a representational level, he thus signifies the potential for participation in transnational spaces beyond particular ethnically marked bodies. Jack's participation, and more generally the potential for participation beyond ethnically defined membership, would be missed in applying a perspective that limits the transnational space to ethnic or national belonging to two places literally speaking. The po-

tential for non-participation in such spaces by ethnically marked bodies presumed to “naturally” belong would equally go unnoticed. Heere, for instance, might easily be ascribed transnationality by virtue of her Indian heritage, thus ignoring her active resistance as represented through her mockery and expression of annoyance when presumed to “fit in” at an Asian themed club night. This scene highlights the difference between representation and self-representation in relation to constructions of British Asians between two cultures. In this instance of self-representation, Heere explicitly refuses the ways in which she is seen and imagined as between cultures and thus ascribed Asianness by Jack, by the club-goers but also, implicitly, by her presence in an Asian Underground scene that relies on such representations.

The contested nature of the transnational space the British Asian music scene in the film is not limited to the portrayal of the characters’ internal negotiations of their participation. Jack’s participation, for instance, is explicitly questioned through the dialogue I opened this chapter with. In the interview he conducts with Sam, an uncritical appropriation of such participation is challenged when “people like you”, i.e. White British people, are accused of unquestioningly presuming the belonging of specific bodies to “British Asian” as a stable category, or in Sam’s words “a bogus definition” from the outset. The dialogue is telling in terms of its refusal of any clear-cut boundaries around the space and subjects it produces and negates at the same time –

a refusal articulated by the very figure producing and mediating transnational spatiality in *Second Generation*. It is also illustrative of fluidity and multiplicity – a direct challenge to assumptions around the British Asian transnational space as “one big brown group” is immediately juxtaposed with a celebration of (musical) hybridity – “At Monsoon it all works - Lata Mangeshkar vs. Hip-Hop, Ghazals vs. R’n’B... bring it all on” – all in one short snippet of conversation between Jack and Sam.

A queer intersectional lens draws attention to the heteronormativity underlying both dramas, and virtually sustaining *Second Generation*. Although perhaps noteworthy in itself, my primary concern here does not lie with the absence of characters scripted as non-heterosexual or queer in both productions. What strikes me as more interesting is how *Second Generation* in particular seems almost unthinkable in separation from its heterosexual matrix. All main plot lines, as well as some of the secondary plots, would lack any substance whatsoever without the heteronormative logic that sustains them. Not only do non-heterosexual characters simply not feature, but every single main character (and the vast majority of supporting characters) is either married, in a heterosexual relationship (or two), or on a mission to being in one. The drama around Heere’s family history relies on her father’s relationship with her mother – and her difficulties in coping with life abroad and the sense of abandonment when eventually “left behind” that led to her suicide, rely on

normative notions of what life in a heterosexual family ought to be like and sense of loss when those ideals fail to materialise. Without this marriage and all its difficulties leading to its tragic end, Mr. Sharma's guilt induced decline in mental health, including his flash-backs to a traumatic past where he conflates Heere with Sonali, would lack their basis. Large parts of the drama centre on the relationship between Heere and her father, and the ways in which that relationship develops, leading up to their reconciliation in the finale, which strongly relies on that very same background.

Without the drama around Heere's relationship triangle between Jack and Sam, the main plot would collapse. Would *Second Generation* have been possible in a scenario where one of the protagonists, for example Jack or Sam, had been a woman? Drawing up an alternate plot for the film is not my intention and would not substantially add to the discussion. The point I would like to make instead is that the drama takes heteronormativity for granted to the extent that not only does the drama exclusively consist of normatively heterosexual (as well as cisgendered) characters and storylines, but it relies so strongly on heterosexual coupledom as an unquestioned/unquestionable norm, that the plot would be virtually devoid of content should that assumption be removed, shifted, or reversed. Viewing *Second Generation* queer intersectionally thus points to what is left out of the frame, to what might go unnoticed and hence unquestioned without particular attention to the ways in which the

drama relies on heteronormative discourses shaping the lives, relationships and desires of its characters. Due to the implicit nature of this (non-)framing of heteronormativity, the viewer is implicated in that the plot is only accessible to an audience if these underlying assumptions around heterosexuality, relationships and family life literally go without saying. The plot only “works” if these unspoken assumptions are indeed widely shared.

Extending thinking queer intersectionally about what is left out of the frame, about what is silenced by omission and/or by overt reliance on hetero norms in the narratives of *Britz* and *Second Generation*, raises additional questions around the cultural and racial coding of sexuality and heteronormativity in the dramas. *Bend it like Beckham*’s much discussed line “But... you’re Indian!!”<sup>7</sup> in response to Tony’s coming out to Jess (cf. Bielawska 2009; Gopinath 2005b; Desai 2004) has opened up dialogue about what the bafflement in her immediate response might imply in terms of representing the British Asian transnational space as heteronormative and homophobic. Desai (2004: 202), in her analysis of *Bend it like Beckham*, contrasts “the deployment of queer characters” with “feminist heterosexual figures” and argues that the marginality of the former works towards reinforcing “the centrality of the heterosexual narrative”. She notes that “[m]ale same-sex desire within Asian British communi-

<sup>7</sup> In a humorous scene in Gurinder Chadha’s *Bend it like Beckham*, this exclamation is British Sikh protagonist Jess’ immediate response when, after she confesses to her old friend Tony that she is in love with her white football coach Joe, Tony reveals that he in turn is gay. The audience is left to ponder which transgression ought to be considered “worse” in a British Asian cultural context – crossing racial boundaries, or homosexuality. The implication that both are taboo is driven home later in the film when Tony asks Jess’ father for her hand in marriage in an attempt to provide the two of them with a “cover story” for what is scripted as sanctioned, if not impossible, romantic/sexual attachments.

ties in the film, if it is named at all, can only be named to be disavowed, while female same-sex desire is denied altogether" (Desai 2004: 203). Gopinath locates any potential for female queerness in *Bend it like Beckham* "not in the immigrant home but rather in the girls' locker room" (2005: 129), a queerness that is eventually disavowed in favour of adequately heterosexual camaraderie and friendship between the protagonists. Queer male side characters, in this mode of analysis, serve to firmly place the female lead within heteronormative narratives of romance as well as feminist agency (Desai 2004; Gopinath 2005b).

While Gopinath (2005b) then applies a queer diasporic lens to trace the "impossible" queer female subject through a wide range of South Asian (diasporic) cultural productions, my approach here requires a different angle, for neither *Britz* nor *Second Generation* affords an easy entry point to such an excavation of queerness. As indicated above, neither of the films features any queer characters, nor is sexuality explicitly addressed in any plot line or dialogue between characters. Nevertheless, I suggest that this silence, in concert with the heteronormative undertones discussed here, speaks volumes to the effect of foreclosing the possibility of non-normative alignments in a space coded as British Asian. While Gopinath (2005b) and Desai (2004) are chiefly concerned with representations of gender and sexuality in their analyses, a queer intersectional reading of *Britz* and *Second Generation*, in absence of obvi-

ous markers of queerness, opens up space to shift my attention to the entangled nature of both gender and sexuality with transnationality and other markers of differentiation. Here it becomes instructive to pay closer attention first to Heere's relationship with Sam at the heart of the drama, and, in due course, to the side plot around her sister Rina's extramarital affair with Sam's brother Firoz.

In the narrative around Heere's renewed relationship with Sam *Second Generation* references religious heterogeneity within the British Asian transnational space. Heere and her family, the Sharmas, are Hindu, while the Khans, Sam's family, are Muslim. Reading both families' objections to the rekindling of the protagonists' relationship as purely a matter of religious difference, prejudice and conflict, however, proves inadequate. Their religious background (in addition to being coded into the family names) is occasionally flagged. In a dialogue between Sam and Firoz, for instance, after Sam confesses that he saw Heere again and still has feelings for her, humorous reference is made to the "fun factor" of Hinduism compared to Islam. The same dialogue, however, also carries conflictual connotations in referring back to their youth, to their previous relationship that didn't end well.

F: She's still a nice little Hindu girl

S: Let's all convert, Hindus have more fun!

F: He stopped it once already

S: We're not kids anymore

F: This goes deeper than you think...

While this snippet of dialogue indeed suggests that religious difference separated them in the past and would render a renewed relationship illicit, what the narrative arc foregrounds, more so than religious dogma, is the long and complicated genealogy of friendship and business partnership between the two families, particularly between Mr. Kahn and Mr. Sharma, opportunistic betrayal in the past, and Pria and Rina's taking over of the factory and forcing long-term partner Mr. Kahn out of business. When Sam seeks an open conversation with his father, he is confronted with a strong reaction.

Sam: If I found someone I thought I could be with, would it matter to you if she wasn't Muslim?

Mr. Kahn: Have you found someone?

S: I'm asking you what you think.

K: It's not what I would prefer, but, no it wouldn't matter.

S: And what if I told you it was Heere?

K: Heere... Heere Sharma?!

S: I think it could be something that lasts.

K: No, it's a mistake Sam!

S: What's so wrong?

K: You, you can't do this to us.

S: It's got nothing to do with you!

K: For once, look at the bigger picture Samir.

S: I care about her Baba, surely that's all that matters.

K: You can't be part of that family.

S: Why can't you just drop this Hindu-Muslim stuff, why are you both such hypocrites? You can work together, be friends all your life, but you don't want your kids to be together? It's just about me and her this time. You and Sharma can't stop us anymore.

K: You don't understand Sam...

Mr. Kahn's opposition here stems from the fact that Mr. Sharma's daughters, adding salt to an old wound, have just made him redundant. Sam, however, is only partially aware of past and present intrigues and thus continues to assume that religion is the issue. What neither he nor Sam know when this dialogue takes place is that Firoz, due to his intimate relations with Rina, is part of the factory's future and thus, resentful that his father "sold out" to Sharma years ago, complicit in making Mr. Kahn redundant. Thus, while played out along a Hindu-Muslim binary, the issue at stake is a complicated history of migration, friendship, family tragedy and capitalism. Religious boundaries are thus representationally present in *Second Generation*, but equally crossed in many ways: Heere and Sam's relationship materialises eventually, Rina has an affair with Firoz, Mr. Kahn shows religious tolerance in the dialogue quoted above, and the families attend each other's religious functions. Other than as interpretive frame readily available to Sam (and perhaps the audience?), as a kind of spectre from a past imagined, religion and religious difference serve to illustrate the heterogeneity *Second Generation* portrays as British Asian on the one hand, and multiple "traditionalities" on the other.

All female characters in *Second Generation*, but particularly Pria and Rina, furthermore quite obviously disrupt any potentially lingering tropes of the docile and submissive Asian woman so aptly deconstructed in critical

scholarship (cf. Huq 2003; Puwar and Raghuram 2003; Brah 1996; Puar 1996).

Both sisters are portrayed as fairly Thatcherite in their business practice, most evidently in the ways in which they ruthlessly scheme to gain control of the factory, rather conveniently decide to turn off their father's life support (alas he recovers just before they get the chance), and push Mr. Kahn out of the factory, the business he built with his friend Sharma. They are equally in control of their households and families, not leaving much room for patriarchal control. The patriarchs, while dialogically living up to their discursive construction as controlling and oppressive, are portrayed as tragic and weak figures: Sharma suffers ill mental health and is guilt-ridden for his leaving Sonali behind, and Kahn commits suicide for he cannot face the betrayal of being forced out of his life's work at the factory. It is Pria and Rina who sustain both, the ideals of family norms and heterosexuality deeply embedded in their entrepreneurial middle class setting, and the taboo of transgressing these boundaries by Rina's affair with Firoz, outside of the nuclear family and across religious boundaries. Holding up appearances, orchestrated by the sisters, is portrayed as what equally sustains the nuclear family, the extended family and community life at a larger scale, yet also as what is already bound to fail.

An intersectionality that relies on identity markers like class or religion might in this instance fail to grasp both the more subtle reference to histories

of migration, entangled with friendship, mutual obligation and neoliberal tales of entrepreneurship, and the ways in which Heere and Rina's amorous life choices queerly disrupt discursive norms around proper (Asian) femininity and legitimate sexual relations. Through these plots then, *Second Generation* offers a gentle counter narrative to easy conflations of patriarchal family relations, religious essentialism and sexual repression with culturalist constructions of British Asian spaces.

### **Queering the jihad?**

While I certainly do not wish to argue that there is progressive potential to be retrieved in acts of violence perpetrated in the name of religion, a queer intersectional reading of Sohail and Nasima's story in *Britz* shifts attention to subtle ways in which the suicide bomber is scripted unconventionally – as female, as not all that fundamentalist at all, as not even all that devout, and as not only reluctant and ambivalent, but as almost accidental. Along the way, Nasima's story playfully disrupts a number of well-trodden tropes at home in the caught between cultures paradigm – she queers not only the figure of the terrorist, “typically understood as culturally, ethnically, and religiously nationalist, fundamentalist, patriarchal, and often even homophobic” (Puar 2007: 221), but equally constructions of the docile Asian woman such as

the ones revisited in chapter five. In contrast to the juxtaposition of a demure, downward glancing Nasima set back against an assertive Sohail in the foreground of the billboard, as well as the Nasima, primarily in her sister role, of episode one where her activism is portrayed as idealistic and perhaps a little naïve, the Nasima we encounter in her own right in the second episode is multi-layered and defies ready-made assumptions around her subject position.

In her last conversation with Matloob, who assisted her in preparing the explosives and finalising the mission, she asks him not to be sad when he drops her off nearby the target:

N: I believe in what I'm doing.

M: You'll sit at god's right hand...

N: That's not why I'm doing it.

While she thus makes quite clear that religion is *not* what drives her, this is the only instance in *Britz* where her motives are explicitly addressed, and what *does* drive her instead remains implied and open to interpretation. Not doing it to "sit at god's right hand" suggests that Nasima queers the Muslim fundamentalist turned suicide bomber by having more worldly motives than religious martyrdom. Rather than attempting to excavate her true motivations, or my interpretation thereof, I close this analysis by turning to the multiple layers of Nasima in her becoming suicide bomber, or becoming Sha-

hida, *Britz* plays with. On the surface, Nasima the suicide bomber seems to simply re-iterate the profiling of the homegrown terrorist encountered earlier – British Pakistani, well-educated, disillusioned and marked by racism and “motivated by a sense of injustice faced by Muslims in Britain and throughout the world”, as the closing message of *Britz* would have it. At closer inspection, however, Nasima’s story is characterised by her increasing retreat and pensiveness, isolation and loss rather than politico-religious fervour as she reluctantly becomes a fundamentalist, to borrow from the title of Hamid’s well-known novel.<sup>8</sup> Nasima’s becoming Shahida represents a queering moment that infuses *Britz* and provides a strong counter-narrative to a surface-reading that posits the finale of the film as a realisation/materialisation of the profile of the British suicide bomber encountered earlier.

Spivak (2004; see also Puar 2007) argues that the female suicide bomber is not gendered, and does not make a gendered point, as the act of a suicide bombing entails “no recoding of the gender struggle” (Spivak 2004: 97) and female suicide bombers are the product of masculinist organisations (Puar 2007: 220). While, indeed, Nasima’s final act does not challenge gender relations as such, one might ask why it should be expected to do so. I suggest that *Britz*’s representation of the drama’s suicide bomber as female is nevertheless gendered, and queers the masculine coding of the terrorist through a reversal

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<sup>8</sup> Mohsin Hamid (2007). *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. London: Hamish Hamilton.

of gender roles. Puar (2007: 221) notes "how queerness is constitutive of the suicide bomber and the tortured body: de-linked from sexual identity to signal instead temporal, spatial, and corporeal schisms". In contrast to scholarly work on the female suicide bomber situated within a counter-terrorism framework (Cragin and Daly 2009; Skaine 2006; Bloom 2005; Davis 2003) that, as Brunner (2007) points out, posits the female suicide bomber as the ultimate irrational other, somehow (mis)led or deceived into terrorism, *Britz* thus allows for a reading of Nasima that troubles such discursive constructions.

Nasima's female body that is, in a way, one with the bomb, and ultimately entangled with Sohail's, whom she embraces whilst pulling the trigger, challenges and queers "normative conventions of gender, sexuality, and race, disobeying normative conventions of 'appropriate' bodily practices" (Puar 2007: 221). While this queering culminates in the final moment of detonation, it is her becoming Shahida throughout the drama that leads her there, made up of moments of loss, reflection, and search entangled with more bodily becomings.

Unlike the tank or the missile that is clearly visible, the weapon carried in the shape of the body is invisible. Thus concealed, it forms part of the body. It is so intimately part of the body that at the time of detonation it annihilates the body of its bearer, who carries with it the bodies of others when it does not reduce them to pieces. The body does not simply conceal a weapon. The body is transformed into a weapon, not in a metaphorical sense but in the truly ballistic sense. (Mbembé 2003: 36)

The gendered narrative around concealment is carried through Nasima's story – is indeed one of her first encounters with her becoming Shahida. The transformation of her body into a weapon, or the transformation of the explosives into her body does not take place suddenly or naturally at any one particular moment. It is as much part of her becoming as her contemplative face hinting at thought processes leading to her momentous decision and the plot elements providing her with food for thought. The weapon, in Nasima's case, while "carried in the shape of the body", is visible and invisible at the same time. It is not visible as weapon, but highly visible in the shape of a heavily pregnant belly. Her pregnant body becomes a cyborg body "resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence" (Haraway 1991: 151). Her becoming Shahida involves an active learning to become one with the bomb-pregnant womb, how to wear it, how to carry it, and how to walk with it. In the process, she disrupts the gendered narrative around the naturalness with which a woman can conceal: "Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other" (Haraway 1991: 151). Nasima's cyborg body is made up of flesh, explosives, textile womb, and her labour (Figure 4) of incorporation in reworking posture (nature?) as much as assumed naturalness (culture?). Puar and Rai have called the suicide bomber a perverse projectile "that machines together life and death, suicide and homicide, resistance and self-annihilation, flesh and

metal" (2004: 98), resistant yet always also complicit (2004: 79). This simultaneity of resistance and complicity subtly characterises Nasima's becoming Shahida. While quite clearly complicit in the jihadist project, which her actions, however ambiguously, support, her complex becomings also resist masculinised tropes of the suicide bomber as well as appropriate (Asian?) femininity, and feminised assumptions around the naturalness of carrying baby/bomb. The perverse projectile, playing on the irony and perversity of the cyborg body (Haraway 1991), furthermore creatively speaks back to Kalra's concerns that an increased focus on British Asian (Muslim) masculinities risks carrying uneasy attachments to "the policy terrain marked by 'home-grown terrorists', 7/7 and the perceived threat of Islam" (Kalra 2009: 119). Nasima, as a female suicide bomber, reluctant fundamentalist, cyborg and perverse projectile, embodies and queers *Britz*'s ambivalence between re-iterating the racial profile of the British suicide bomber with its attachment to British Asian bodies, and the counter-narratives a queer intersectional reading has facilitated throughout this chapter. Spivak (2004) then brings me back, for a final time, to the sides to be on and to choose from that have accompanied my analysis:

Suicidal resistance is a message inscribed in the body when no other means will get through. It is both execution and mourning, for both self and other, where you die with me for the same cause, no matter which side you are on (...). (Spivak 2004: 96)

Nasima's becoming Shahida, read through this passage, queers the sides the protagonists represent and queers (anti)terrorism. In pulling the trigger, she mourns for Sabia who is already dead, and for Sohail whom she will kill alongside herself and others. He does, indeed, die with her for the same cause – even if that cause remains ambiguous. Ultimately, it does not matter which side she was on, or which side Sohail was on. The transnationalities that this chapter has gradually seen converge in jointly producing Sohail's as well as Nasima's subject position, (counter)terror, complicity and resistance, are entangled as one in the end.



Figure 4 - *Britz* still, Nasima's becoming cyborg

## Concluding remarks

The Communications Act (2003) obliges Channel 4 not only to be innovative, creative and distinctive, but to commit to a “broad range of high quality and diverse programming which, in particular (...) appeals to the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society”. The Digital Economy Act (Houses of Parliament 2010) further mandates “the broadcasting or distribution (...) of feature films that reflect cultural activity in the United Kingdom”; that Channel 4 programming has to “stimulate well-informed debate on a wide range of issues, including by providing access to information and views from around the world and by challenging established views” and to “promote alternative views and new perspectives”. In the channel’s early days, “ethnic minorities, along with women and youth audiences, represented [its] principal target” (Malik 2008: 344). More recently, however, Malik locates a discursive shift away from multiculturalism to a more diffuse notion of diversity programming involving “a break from a race politics underpinned by a quantitative or so-called ‘politically correct’ response to a multicultural society to one that positions ‘cultural diversity’ as a qualitative mindset that depends on ‘common sense’” (Malik 2008: 346). Saha (2012) places this discursive turn from niche programming for ethnic audiences to diversity programming for mass audiences firmly within a global turn to neoliberalism and the increasing marketisation of public service television. In concert, these shifts have facilitated the reification of stereotypical on-screen representations of South

Asians. Channel 4, as the platform where *Britz* and *Second Generation* were produced and broadcast, thus situates them in a position where the kinds of readings they elicit is closely linked to questions around how British society looks at and thinks of its minorities, of difference, of what it perceives as its Other. If indeed the established views in need of challenging include racism, islamophobia, gendered norms and heteronormativity, the alternative views that do the challenging should encourage anti-racist, feminist, anti-normative readings that de-essentialise, decentre and deconstruct common-sense constructions of such “otherness”. Normativities and established views, after all, are no strangers to one another.

The films this chapter has engaged with form part of a wide range of cultural productions produced in and through the British Asian transnational space – by virtue of the subject matter *Britz* and *Second Generation* address as well as by the dialogue the dramas open up about possible ways of narrating that space. At the same time, the films are not – or at least not exclusively – produced for an audience situated within the British Asian transnational space, but for the wider British public including British Asians. Reading *Britz* and *Second Generation* queer intersectionally has offered an entry point to reading transnationality differently, a framing that decentres (without fully displacing) the dominant discursive production of British Asian spaces and subjects as always already loaded with preconfigured meanings attached to

Britishness and Asianness. Using a lens that purposefully overlooks such pre-  
configurations allows for readings that emphasise counter-narratives where  
transnationality emerges differently, inadvertently, in entanglements with in-  
stances of becoming through gender, through race and racism, through reli-  
gion as practice or affiliation; but no less through avenues less conventionally  
thought of intersectionally such as musical amalgamation, anti-capitalism, or  
somewhat reluctant fundamentalism in its political rather than strictly reli-  
gious incarnation. This chapter has thus been an exercise in expanding the  
horizon of transnational potentiality in the two Channel 4 dramas beyond  
mere transnationality, as well as beyond narrowly intersectional preoccupa-  
tions with gendered, raced and classed oppression or identification. It has  
drawn attention to the multiple ways in which all of the above form part of  
the discourses on transnational becomings that are possible in entanglements  
that escape attention when approached with familiarity. Importantly, the  
point has not been to do away with modes of reading that emphasise transna-  
tional bifocality, but to offer an alternative that refuses to halt there and insists  
on questioning what other modes of reading, and of producing knowledge  
become possible by slightly shifting the frame.

## **Chapter Seven: Becoming Transnational on Tumblr?**

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*“Maintaining the tension of subject and subjectless is one of the challenges of working with queer framings.” (O’Riordan 2007: 17)*

The Tumblr blog at the heart of this chapter, *Bhagyawati*, forms part of a wider range of web content that makes meaning in/of/through British Asian spaces in terms of its production, curation, authorship or audiences. While the television dramas that chapter six has analysed touch upon the subject of this case study, the British Asian transnational space, through their plot, characters, and the role Channel 4 plays in disseminating those representations to the wider British public, the Tumblr blog this chapter turns to is – at least at first sight – situated more immediately within a British Asian transnational space. The added caution of “at first sight” is not merely a rhetorical device in this context, but expresses concern with any immediacy in ascribing specific bodies, subjects and voices to the British Asian transnational space based on

ethnic or racial markers. The analysis this chapter embarks on thus extends the dialogue chapters two and three have engaged in around transnational spaces and subjects, and chapter four in relation to intersectional thinking and doing, to the arena of cybicultural representation. The subject-object relations remain unchanged from the rest of this case study: the British Asian transnational space is the subject of study and as such is used to further explore the object of study, the queer intersectional approach to transnational subjects which it is considered to be a *case of*. Methodologically, like my analysis of *Britz* and *Second Generation*, this chapter draws on the discursive approach that I have introduced in chapter five. The structured questions I pose to the material shift marginally, due to the different nature of the material this chapter is about. In reading *Bhagyawati* queer intersectionally, the analysis explores what a shift in registers from investigating representations of British/Asian transnationality to a broader exploration of becomings through content curation on *Bhagyawati* might reveal. The structuring questions I have taken to my reading of the *Bhagyawati* Tumblr are: What attachments does the blog represent? What discourses do those attachments invoke/challenge? What place does transnationality hold in the blog? What normativities are represented in the blog? Are normativities reified/challenged/subverted? How so?

## Contextualising Tumblr as a site for becomings

Before moving on to the queer intersectional analysis of the blog, it is necessary to extend some thought to context and affordances of Tumblr as the platform *Bhagyawati* is hosted on. What follows is by no means a comprehensive review of scholarly work on blogging or microblogging. Rather, it is an attempt to provide enough of a background to contextualise this chapter's analysis within scholarship that speaks to its online nature.

Tumblr, the microblogging platform that hosts Bhagyawati, was launched in 2007 and is currently owned by Yahoo! Inc.. As of July 8 2014 Tumblr hosts as many as 194 million individual blogs<sup>1</sup>, or "Tumblrs". Blogs, as well as the "blogosphere" at large, have been identified as worthwhile objects of inquiry for a number of reasons. Hookway (2008) highlights their instantaneous and public availability, anonymity, and easy access to data, amongst other advantages for researchers. Beyond such practicalities, blogs are useful in shedding light on the spatiality and temporality of everyday life (Hookway 2008: 93) and form a significant part of cultural representation online. In drawing on blogs for research it is important to keep in mind, however, that who becomes a blogger in the first place, and who gets read, respectively who gathers a following and who remains in obscurity are not neutral processes. While blogs thus offer potentially counter-hegemonic spaces for

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<sup>1</sup> Information retrieved from the live counter on <http://www.tumblr.com/about> on 8 July 2014.

non-normative framings, the blogosphere, as the world wide web at large, is fraught with power relations, including digital divides in terms of access and digital literacy that constrain those very same spaces (cf. Wight 2013; Carstensen and Winker 2012; Murthy 2011, 2008; Gajjala 1998).

A Tumblr allows users to easily post text, image and multimedia content, reblog existing posts, and comment (“post notes” in Tumblr speak) in response to other users’ contributions. With thousands of ready-made blog themes and a straightforward set-up process, a blog can be launched within a mere few minutes without high requirements in terms of infrastructure and tech skills. While it features social networking components such as following other blogs, posting comments, liking posts, sharing posts (reblogging), and asking questions to bloggers, in contrast to social networking platforms such as Facebook, a blogger’s offline identity need not be divulged, which facilitates pseudonymous or anonymous blogging. Given that the platform provides the option to easily reblog existing content, in contrast to more traditional blog formats, the main activity of many a Tumblr, certainly the one this chapter engages with, is content curation rather than the creation of original content.<sup>2</sup> The resulting blogs are perhaps best described as a digital equivalent to analogous scrapbooks or photo albums. Such online journals provide a cre-

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<sup>2</sup> While a post can (usually) be traced back to the original contributor for attribution, this merely reveals who first blogged a particular piece of content on Tumblr, which only coincides with the copyright holder in case it is original content. Often, however, the original poster has blogged content they appreciate from another website/source rather than produced content, particularly where image and multimedia content is concerned.

ative space to visually articulate ideas, experiences, identities, and affects. Some are narrowly themed around particular kinds of topics, aesthetics, or politics, and others reflect the personal musings of the blogger curating them. Tumblr thus arguably epitomises the characteristics of intertextuality, nonlinearity, reader/writer convergence, and “multimedianess” that Mitra and Cohen (1999) have attributed to the world wide web long before the advent of blogging, let alone microblogging. Thus while a conventional blog is to a certain extent characterised by a linear narrative, at least in a chronological sense (Hookway 2008: 94), *Bhagyawati* belongs to the “generation” of microblogs that Munteanu (2011: 97) describes as “becoming more hybrid, more interconnected, more visually/synesthetically oriented”. While Badger (2004) already noted a certain visual quality in relation to traditional blog formats, Tumblr amplifies that notion by placing (mostly visual) multimedia content curation at its core in a way that has been likened to nonlinear “streams of virtual consciousness” (Munteanu 2011: 97).

A longstanding and widely circulated definition of such digital content curation states that it is “about maintaining and adding value to a trusted body of digital information for current and future use” (Giaretta 2005, quoted in Beagrie 2006: 6). Digital curation so broadly defined applies to a wide range of contexts, including research, libraries and digital archives. In the context of web 2.0’s shift to user-generated content and sharing on social media (Han

2011) more specifically, the meaning of curation expands to excerpting, reproducing, linking, tagging, and sharing the work of others, all the while retaining the original notion of adding value through the practice of curation. Instead of creating new content, users find news, images, multi-media content, as well as posts by other bloggers or websites and curated them into collections to be shared with an audience (Saaya et al. 2013). Content curators “provide an editorial perspective by highlighting interesting content” (Zhong et al. 2013: 659) and thus add their own angle through the selection they make. Tumblr, alongside other platforms such as Pinterest or Storify, facilitate the curation of content that users discover, collect, showcase, and share on their own blog or profile (Zhong et al. 2013: 666). As is the case for many Tumblrs, *Bhagyawati* predominantly curates existing content from other Tumblrs and elsewhere on the world wide web, rather than creating original content. Where original content is indeed created, it is most often short personal notes that intersperse the frequent posts and reblogs of images, gifs, and multimedia content, and answers to anonymous or personal questions the blogger receives via Tumblr’s “ask” feature. Compared to other blogging platforms, particularly by more traditional providers such as Wordpress or Blogger, microblogs consist of shorter posts that require considerably less time, effort, and know-how in terms of generating content (Marquart 2010; Java et al. 2007). While microblogging is taken to the extreme on Twitter, where a post consists of 140 characters or less, Tumblr allows a wider range of formats as

well as longer posts. While some emphasise the social networking capacities of microblogging sites in terms of shareability and interactivity (Marquart 2010), research has also shown that a majority of users on platforms strongly emphasising content curation, such as Tumblr or Pinterest, value content curation as a solitary rather than a social activity (Zhong et al. 2013). They use such services primarily as a means to scrap-book content of personal interest or aesthetic value to themselves, and the sharing of content with followers becomes somewhat of a side-effect in the process of collecting and curating.

Crampton (2003: 104) theorises blogging as a Foucaultian technology of the self where blogs are “a form of resistance to normalization because they are where one works on oneself in a process of becoming”. Blogging has also been found to blur the boundaries between the body and textuality, introducing “a sense of corporeality (...) whereby blogs are the bodies of bloggers, offering a representation as well as a space for the embodied digital individual” (Boyd 2006: 49). Similarly, Rak (2005) describes blogging as performative and notes that “blogging itself (...) produces its own subject, whose relationship to offline discourses of truth and reality are designed to create identity as its special effect” (2005: 180). Boyd, however, adds that such a reading is necessarily troubled by the gaps that result from selective representation and online performativity: “the blog does not show [the bloggers] entirely, but only what they choose to perform in that context” (Boyd 2006: 50). This tension

between what Sundén (2003: 13) refers to as “typing oneself into being” and Crampton (2003: 95) calls “self-writing” and the inherent selectivity/partiality of content curation on the blog shall accompany my analysis of *Bhagyawati* and inform the queer intersectional reading this chapter offers. Indeed, questions around the relationship between knowability and becoming transpire as the crux of my analysis, and tie it to the wider dialogue between transnationality, intersectionality, and thinking about modes of knowledge production that this case study participates in.

### **British Asian Transnationality Online?**

Not only is the South Asian online presence continually expanding (Murthy 2010: 191), but scholarship interrogating Asian web cultures has grown steadily over the past two decades (cf. Mallapragada 2013; Murthy 2010; Gajjala and Gajjala 2008; Mitra and Gajjala 2008; Nayak and Rybas 2008; Parker and Song 2006; Mitra 2005; Gajjala 2004; Gopal 2004; Adams and Ghose 2003; Mitra 1997; Rai 1995). While the technologies underlying such case studies might be under constant shift to the extent that reading about text based multi-user dungeons (MUD) feels rather quaint in 2014, the conceptual debates around the role of web cultures in forming and sustaining transnational and/or diasporic communities and identities are foundational for the

work of this chapter. It is noteworthy that, perhaps due to the networked nature of the web, the focus has not exclusively been on place-bound *British* Asian online platforms and blogs, but more widely on the South Asian digital diaspora(s), and online communities or identities. If the plethora of scholarship on British Asian (offline) communities, some of which I have discussed in chapter five, is an indication of scholarly interest in British Asianness, that attention seems more diffuse in online spaces. This shift is perhaps indicative of some of the questions around online communities and the virtual/real divide this chapter grapples with. What precisely would constitute a British Asian space online? Implicit or explicit self-declaration? An url or name? Offline characteristics such as ethnicity or migratory background? A server location? As such rhetorical questions may suggest, this chapter takes the stance that neither provide an apt basis for a semblance of boundedness around particular subjects but not others. While this thesis extends similar views to offline contexts, the networked context of Tumblr and other online spaces offers a particularly fruitful arena to extend further thought to these issues.

Much cybercultural research has been concerned with virtual communities, respectively the translatability of the notion of community to online spaces, and with identity play (Silver 2000). Watson (1997) discusses the politics of ownership of the term “community”. He suggests that

Refusal to apply 'community' as a descriptor for online collectivities stems either from a desire to retain a purified notion of community in the hands of those who claim to know 'true' community, or from an unwillingness to recognize [computer mediated communication] technologies as a medium with the potential to change traditional social arrangements. (Watson 1997: 121)

While scholarship concerned with online communities has been instructive in gaining a better understanding of the varying ways in which diasporic groups use online media, or more generally, what people *do* online, it has not been particularly reflexive of the ways in which the boundaries around such communities are drawn (online or off) in the first place. Mitra (1997) already raised this point early on in the history of Internet research when he questioned the practicability of online ethnic enclaving. His case-study on the usenet group soc.culture.indian (SCI) illustrates the ease with which users "cross into areas where they simply do not belong" as "there are no technological barriers to posting a note to any newsgroup one desires" (Mitra 1997: 62). His examples include cross-posting between the Indian, Pakistani, and Hawaiian usenet groups and point to the absence of technological barriers to posting where one does "not belong" rather than interrogating the notion of ethnically/culturally/nationally "belonging" to a usenet group. A range of research on online spaces has (often uncritically) assumed online communities to coincide with geographically, ethnically, culturally or nationally bound groups (cf. Parker and Song 2006; Adams and Ghose 2003; Mitra 2005, 2001, 1997). Adams and Ghose, for instance, are concerned with online

spaces and what people do to/with/in what they identify as transnational “bridgespaces”. Questions around how such a “bridgespace” and transnational becomings relate to one another, however, are side-lined. Acknowledging that the group whose online behaviour they research is ethnically diverse, they nevertheless take the “groupness” of “Indian citizens living in the USA as well as immigrants from India and their descendants” (Adams and Ghose 2003: 415) as distinct enough to constitute a community who inhabits a transnational online “bridgespace”. Approaches unquestioningly relying on such assumptions of online belonging based on notions of ethnic origin and place have rightfully been critiqued for “totalising constructions of South Asia online” (Murthy 2010: 181). Scholarship clustered around the notion of digital diaspora has, on the other hand, been more careful to not imply a monolithic diaspora as its basis (cf. Skop and Adams 2009; Gajjala and Gajjala 2008; Nayak and Rybas 2008; Mitra and Gajjala 2008; Gajjala 2008, 2004; Gopal 2004). Skop and Adams have highlighted how diasporic participants in online spaces pursue a range of differing goals including ethnic preservation, detachment, as well as hybridisation (Skop and Adams 2009: 143); and Nayak and Rybas (2008) argue that the digital diaspora “is not limited to the tension between the centrifugal force of virtuality and the centripetal force of ethnicity” (Nayak and Rybas 2008: 187). Despite critical attention to diversity within online diasporic groups and an emphasis on the plurality of diasporas, however, the underlying assumption that offline ethnic and cultural markers

and/or geographic place of origin/heritage/migratory background correspond to belonging to and participation in particular diasporic sites online remains intact. As in work concerned with online communities, the ways in which such digital diasporas are written into being (Sundén 2003) and the interplay between becoming transnational(ly) and the online spaces such becomings are performed in remain tacit.

The small cluster of research that has taken place on the nexus between queer, South Asian, and the negotiation of subjectivities online — Mitra and Gajjala (2008: 402) have referred to it as “gaping void for both queer theory and South Asian studies” — has predominantly employed queer as an attribute, often standing in for LGBT identities, to people or platforms and has examined queer South Asian bloggers (Mitra 2010; Mitra and Gajjala 2008) rather than used queer as a non-normative lens. Rak (2005: 179) identifies the workings of search engines and directories as an explanation for why queer blogging predominantly constructs queer as an LGBT identity: queer blogs, like other blogs, want to be found and read, and are therefore categorised in ways that make them easy to find by the means of homogeneous keywords and listings in equally homogeneous blog directories. Queer blogs doing queer work (or working with queer) beyond identity categories would, following that logic, be more difficult if not impossible to identify as queer. It is thus perhaps not surprising that queer studies online follow the queers

online. My work here, however, does not add to the scholarship on queer blogging or online spaces defined as queer. *Bhagyawati* is not a queer blog in Mitra and Gajjala's sense of "online-offline formations of meaning making around what it means to be Indian or 'desi' and 'gay/lesbian/bi' in a transnational space" (2008: 402). Neither is it my intention to excavate particularly queer aesthetics within the blog or to argue for its inherent queerness after all. Rather, the queer here operates to sharpen my intersectional lens, and to remain attentive to moments on the Tumblr in which normativities are interrogated or disrupted. That not only includes heteronorms and gender norms, but applies to questioning all readily available meaning that might stick too easily to content and aesthetics of *Bhagyawati*.

The common denominator of a range of scholarship on online communities and/or digital diasporas is a conceptual legacy of Anderson's (1983) notion of imagined communities (cf. Gajjala 2011, 2008, 2003; Shaksari 2011; Nayak and Rybas 2008; Mitra 2005, 1997; Rai 1995). In this context, Mitra (1997) reflects on the connection between imagining and imaging, and takes the entangled nature of the two "to indicate the ways in which a community, albeit electronic, can textually produce itself, thus imagine itself – as well as present itself to the outside world, and thus produce an image" (Mitra 1997: 55). Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert (2012) theorise such imaginings as a transnational practice that digital diasporics mobilise in their becomings. They

elaborate that “imagination is situated, constructed and reconstructed over time and space, it is actual and perceived, and has the potential to be transformative, and also open to contestation and subversion” (Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert 2012: 147). While Mitra’s (1997) piece was set in a rather textual era of the Internet, the twofold notion of imag(in)ing is even more pertinent to content curation on Tumblr where, image by image, an image (in Mitra’s sense) is imagined and expressed to an equally imagined audience.

Gajjala’s work, attentive to the imag(in)ed nature of digital diasporas, observes that

online communities are embedded in actual offline networks of diaspora and because the discourse and online presences/absences impact offline realities, the categories of “virtual” and “real” framed as a mutually exclusive binary cannot be applied. (Gajjala 2008: 47-48)

While framing the argument against a binary opposition between the virtual and the real in terms of “actual offline networks” and “offline realities” versus “discourse and online presences” arguably implies the contrary, she thus concedes that the virtual and real need to be imagined as closely entangled sides of the same coin. In the same text I have cited for its discussion of the politics behind the scholarly label of “online community”, Watson (1997) addresses the virtual/real divide by noting how “people in the offline world tend to see online communities as virtual, but (...) participants in the online communities see them as quite real” (Watson 1997: 129). He at least par-

tially attributes the virtual/real divide to scholarly representation of online culture" wishing to compare these online communities to 'the real thing' in their offline world" (Watson 1997: 129). In addition to the problem of drawing lines around a "community" geographically, ethnically, or by other pre-defined markers on/offline, such research is thus fraught by what Jurgenson (2012) has termed "digital dualism". Such views are premised on the assumption that there is a "real" world that takes place offline and contains "real people", while everything that takes place online is somehow taken to be "virtual" and therefore less real or even unreal (see also Gajjala 2008; Ward 1999; Watson 1997). This imagined division between the real (world) and the virtual (web) is embedded in a long history of encountering "uncanny technologies" (Sconce 2000: 201) such as the telegraph, the television or later the computer when they were introduced, as shrouded in mystery and almost outer worldly. Sconce likens the virtual to the occult as imagined in Victorian spiritualism and suggests that both "obsessions" take place along the same historical trajectory (Sconce 2000). Early research and theorising on the Internet (of both cyber-utopian and cyber-dystopian persuasion) has exacerbated views that consider atoms, the stuff that the "real" is made off, and digital bits and bytes as fundamentally different (Negroponte 1995). Research on virtual communities thus tends to view them as qualitatively different or separate from "real" offline communities by virtue of taking place online, while paradoxically at the same time presuming a close match/overlap between the two based on

ethnicity, geographic origin, migratory background or other boundary markers attached to a particular community from the inside or out. Furthermore, the characteristic “virtual” only seems meaningful as long as the materiality and physicality of infrastructures sustaining the Internet and the services that are available online are glossed over. As Tufekci powerfully points out, “the Internet is not *a* world; it’s part of *the* world” (2012: 14) – a world in which in which “atoms and bits augment each other” (Jurgenson 2012: 87). It thus comes as no surprise that, contra earlier more celebratory accounts where networked genders become malleable (Bruckman 1993), sexuality is playfully disembodied (Wiley 1999), and new technologies subvert gender relations (Turkle 1995; Plant 1997), all while the dominant and the marginal realign online (Mitra 2001, 2005), power relations do not spare the world wide web (Sundén 2003; Harp and Tremayne 2006; Gajjala 2003, 2004, 2008). Gajjala (2004), in her work on/with South Asian women online, for instance emphasises that the “cyborg-diaspora”, as she calls diasporic subjects online, risks complicity in and reification of offline power relations. While her argument refers to the geographical and intellectual hegemony of the “bourgeois/elite westernized postcolonial worldview” (Gajjala 2004: 14) within South Asian online spaces, she points to the prevalence of racialised class positionings and a diasporic complicity “in the production of whitened cyberspace” (Sharma 2003, cited in Gajjala 2004: 14). Pham (2011) examines racialized femininities on the intersections between culture, technology, and capitalism on Asian

American fashion blogs, and Parker and Song (2006) highlight “reflexive racialisation” on British Asian websites. Others have made equivalent observations about gender online. Rai’s (1995) research, for example, interrogates the normative nature of gendered Hindu identities, particularly the hegemony of Hindu nationalist masculinity, which, as Murthy (2010: 186) adds, “not only genders these South Asian diasporic cyberspaces, but also inherently excludes [Muslims]”. As the material this chapter engages with is taken from one single Tumblr blog, however, an analysis of gendered *relations* within online spaces exceeds the scope of my analysis. Rather, what this section hopes to have achieved to contextualise the analysis of *Bhagyawati* is to establish my scepticism on three interrelated points: the notions of online communities and digital diasporas’ reliance on bounded groups and assumed overlap with specific offline ethnic groups, the difficulties with sustaining a stark divide between real/virtual underlying much cybicultural research, and the insight that the Internet does not take place in a vacuum void of power.

### **Encountering *Bhagyawati***

Before proceeding with the queer intersectional reading of *Bhagyawati*, a brief introduction of the Tumblr is in warranted. *Bhagyawati* is a fairly min-

imalistic Tumblr – not only in its use of technology, but also in its visual presentation.

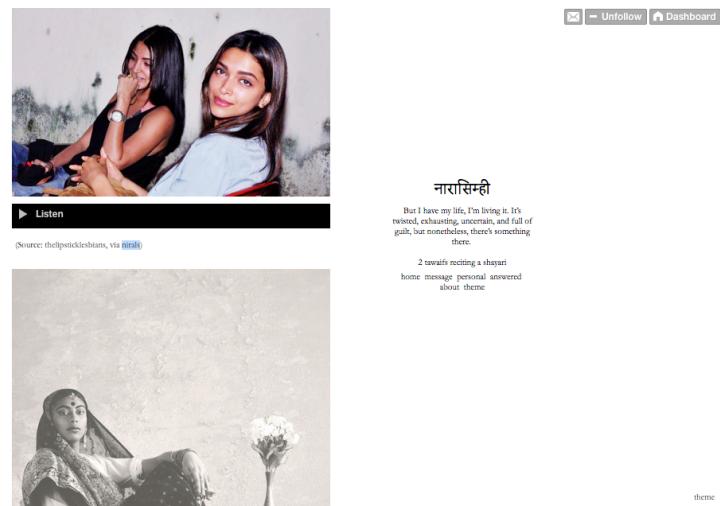


Figure 5 - Screenshot of *Bhagyawati*'s minimalistic appearance

By that I mean that it uses a plain white theme for its design, with no visual distraction from the content displayed in one vertical column down the centre of the page, not even a header or logo. Apart from varying content displayed in the centre column, the blog presents itself as illustrated by the screenshot in Figure 5 throughout. The content consists of images, animated gifs, albums containing both or either, videos, sound clips, poetry, calligraphy and occasional short textual entries. Most of the content is re-posted (reblogged in Tumblr speak) from sources across Tumblr and other websites. The only two tags<sup>3</sup> used as categories are “personal” and “answered”, both containing partially overlapping content originally posted on *Bhagyawati* ra-

<sup>3</sup> Both tags and categories are structuring elements provided within most blog themes, which a blogger can attribute to posts to facilitate archiving and retrieving posts in the future. *Bhagyawati* does not make extensive use of either.

ther than reblogged from elsewhere. None of the curated content, which makes up the vast majority of posts on the blog is categorised or tagged. The category “answered” exclusively contains the blogger’s public answers to questions other users have asked via Tumblr’s message functionality, the vast majority of which are anonymous questions – some more serious in tone than others, ranging from much repeated trivialities such as “are you single?” to political queries such as “what is your view on the Palestine Israeli conflict?” or “who is your favourite feminist?”. The minimalist structure means that the most immediate way of navigating the blog is by the means of manual scrolling further down every time the bottom of the page is reached, adding a timeless quality to the browsing experience<sup>4</sup>. Information on the blogger behind *Bhagyawati* is sparse, and only gradually a few glimpses are revealed on perusing the “answered” tag, where replies to (mostly anonymous) questions asked by other Tumblr users are posted. Misha, as the blogger calls herself, is highly selective in what personal detail she shares on Tumblr. For instance, while she occasionally shares photos of her outfits, her hair or individual body parts, she never posts pictures that would reveal a face. I shall return to both, the selectivity of information provided and the question of overlap between a blog and the expectation of a blogging subject that corresponds to an authentic person in due course. While I occasionally draw on and quote from

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<sup>4</sup> The only other way for visitors to peruse *Bhagyawati*’s content is to manually suffix the url with /archive, leading to a month by month overview of content. In contrast to many other Tumblrs, *Bhagyawati* does not facilitate this option by the means of an “archive” link anywhere on the blog.

the “answered” and “personal” posts, the main emphasis of my analysis lies on the curated visual content. *Bhagyawati*’s imagery draws on an eclectic range of topics touching upon current affairs, advocacy for minorities, human rights, nature photography, human geography, old Bollywood films, Arabic calligraphy, Asian and fusion fashion, Mughal art, world religions or Middle Eastern politics. While a number of overarching aesthetic themes can be identified, for instance an ethnographic gaze, politics and advocacy, and an eye for arts and poetics (see also chapter five), the ones I found most prevalent and persuasive and will thus engage with in more depth here are what I summarise as a nostalgic feel and multiple femininities.

*Bhagyawati* is publicly available to anyone with access to the world wide web. In such a context, possible readings of the blog exceed, and become somewhat detached/detachable from, the blogger’s intentionality:

Thus it is not just the blogger who creates meaning but also the reader and the commenter of the blog who interprets the posted material and suggests contested meanings for it. (...) the webbed interpretation is suggestive of a much larger macro picture than the original individual blogger might have laid ground for. (Mitra and Gajjala 2008: 402)

My use of it in this case study is one such example of webbed meaning created by a reader/researcher. The archive of blog posts used for my analysis in this chapter was assembled by following the blog, browsing its contents, and taking field notes over a period of one year, while five months’ worth of posts were analysed more intensively, as described in chapter five. At no

point during my engagement with the blog resulting in this chapter did I actively intervene with the blog by commenting, reblogging or asking questions, neither anonymously nor by identifying myself as a researcher.<sup>5</sup>

### **Queer Intersections on *Bhagyawati***

Intersectional approaches to online media and cultural production allow for analyses of the interactions between the becoming of subjects, and online representations that pays attention to the particular modes of differentiation that are contextually deployed (Carstensen and Winker 2012: 18). Instead of simply applying pre-defined categories, for instance such as the ones discussed in relation to intersectionality in chapter four, to material produced and curated on Tumblr, it is worth letting the content speak for itself initially, to allow meaning to gradually unfold and reveal potential readings beyond the categories of analysis that present themselves at first sight (or follow from the selection of the case and the subject/object relations of the case study). In an effort to queer not only the intersections encountered on the Tumblr but equally my reading of them, the following discussion centres around mo-

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<sup>5</sup> Discussions of the ethics of researchers' "lurking" in online spaces pivot around the question whether an online contributor is an author who needs to be cited correctly for their content, or a research participant who's informed consent needs to be sought, as well as around different kinds of researcher involvement in the researched space (e.g. Morrow, Hawkins and Kern 2014; Murthy 2008; Ward 1999). While I might characterise my work with the blog as a form of lurking, these questions do not quite capture this Tumblr blog as research subject. Due to the curated nature of the blog, the blogger in this case can hardly be considered the author for any content beyond answered questions and personal comments. Given the public nature of the Tumblr (as opposed to platforms that require membership and login to observe, or Tumblrs set as private), I consider my "lurking" to correspond to the expected behaviour of the wider audience rather than to constitute an intrusive practice for the sake of covertly extracting information.

ments in which some overarching aesthetic themes encountered on *Bhagyawati* and the more literal content of the posts I discuss become entangled in ways that productively engage the object of this case study in dialogue. By narrating the analysis in this way, I hope to tap the potential of methodologically understanding the process of writing the case study as integral part of the analysis (see chapter five). I begin by introducing a tension that accompanies me throughout the entire case study, and particularly through the remainder of this chapter. This tension results from my selection of this particular Tumblr for analysis (over potential others and over potential other forms of data), and what this selection does in terms of the dialogue between subject and object of this case study. The selection of this particular Tumblr was, of course, deliberate as it visually and affectively self-professes transnationality, Britishness, and Asianness, amongst other attachments. Somewhere down the rabbit hole of the research process this researcher has exerted agency and decided that therefore *Bhagyawati* constitutes an adequate representational instance of the British Asian transnational space chapter five has situated as a paradigmatic case of the kind of space this thesis engages with. Such an “obvious” choice is in tension with the questions around transnationality and intersectionality this thesis grapples with, as it is precisely such obviousness in *a priori* assuming transnationality and intersectional categories of analysis that my work is in critical dialogue with. This tension furthermore manifests in the selection of aesthetic themes on the blog to engage with in more detail in this

chapter. On the one hand, my analysis hopes to refrain from presupposing categories of analysis, for instance transnationality or gender, to at least initially let the material speak for itself. On the other hand, however, such an attempt remains partial, and my engagement with the blog's content here is complicit in emphasising particular categories of analysis, as the focus on (and depiction of) multiple femininities as well as the transnationality both themes are infused with shows. Chapter eight will return to this tension and how it speaks to both, the potential and the limitations of this project.

In the few instances, in responses to anonymous questions, where the blogger explicitly engages with notions of belonging, ethnicity, or origins, her responses vary. Repeated questions along the lines of where she was *really* from (Henry 2003) are met with responses ranging from humorous to exasperate. Incidentally one of the very few longer original posts on *Bhagyawati* engages with precisely how the blogger feels about being asked about her ethnic origins so often.

I despise this question, and I'll explain why. I usually answer this with Indian. I'm a mix (...), I have grandparents that identified as either Pakistani, Indian or Italian. My great-grandparents on my mother's side identified as Afghan. (...) I go for Indian because it's the only country and culture I have anything to do with in depth (...). Then again, I'm not Indian. I never will be. My parents have never identified with where they're "originally from". I'm English (yes, you can be brown and English). My father's always called himself English. (...) And this is the first time I've answered with any honesty about how much it really does bother me because I always see these stupid, super patronising posts about how the children/grandchildren etc. of immigrants lose their language, lose their culture, westernise too much and these posts

basically insinuate that they're super terrible people for doing so and that really angers me. (...) I would have been one of those if my parents and I didn't always have a strange passion for travel and languages and learning about cultures and whatnot. I'm Indian through interest more than anything else.

This passage is a rich and reflexive engagement with questions of identity, belonging and racism, and thus interesting in itself, particularly as it stands alongside other instances where the answer to the very same question varies between "100% Indian", other ethnic and national identifications, as well as identifications with place such as "born and brought up and live in London, England". This latter answer is prefixed by "I don't ever understand this question", which reads in stark contrast to the longer post quoted above, that shows that the blogger indeed understands the question well and has nuanced thoughts about its connotations. In re-contextualising this post within *Bhagyawati* as a whole, where personal posts and answered questions represent a fairly small proportion of content compared to the wealth of curated visual and multimedia content, Sundén's notion of "typing oneself into being" (2003: 13) takes on a less literal alignment of *curating oneself into becoming*. This transition not only connotes the obvious dislocation of "typing" original content with "imaging" curated content, but also substitutes the finality of "being" with the tentative and processual "becoming". This subtle shift in orientation opens up space to further interrogate the imag(in)ing of transnational becomings through *Bhagyawati*. Reading the blog through a queer intersectional lens questions all too easy attachments of transnationality to ethni-

cally, culturally, or nationally marked subjects and vice versa. Instead of taking posts such as the one quoted at length above at face value, as data from which to deduce arguments about the blogger Misha and her possibly hybrid subjectivity and multiple sense of belonging, it here provides an entrypoint to questions around the expectation of a unified subject behind the Tumblr. I am less interested in whether or not Misha is “authentic” and corresponds to a “real life” person who tells the truth in her personal posts to somehow legitimate the content she curates for an audience that might expect such an overlap. I am instead more interested in thinking about what the desire to equate a Tumblr with a person does, how a queer intersectional lens might work towards undoing such a desire, and what that in turn means for the conversation between subject and object of this case study. Why does it matter who curates *Bhagyawati* – or, in other words, is it thinkable that the handle Misha, because unverified that is all it is, stands for a group of people curating the blog communally? Or an individual imag(in)ing a subject position other than what would conventionally be considered their own,<sup>6</sup> perhaps even akin to the identity play earlier Internet scholars had in mind (Turkle 1995)? The partiality and selectivity inherent in the online performativity of a blog (Boyd 2006;

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<sup>6</sup> There is, of course, a fine line between creativity and fraud or identity theft. Particularly where gendered, racialized, or minority subject positions are imag(in)ed all too freely, ethical questions arise. The appropriation of minoritized identities by the privileged crosses that line. Compare for example the concerns around the recurring theme of white men (or women) setting out to save brown women from brown men (Spivak 1988) that arose after it transpired that the narratives published on a blog called “A gay girl in Damascus” during the early days of the Syrian uprising, supposedly recounted by a young Syrian lesbian named Amina Arraf in 2011, were revealed as authored by a US American white man in what the media referred to as a “hoax” (Addley 2011; Bell and Flock 2011).

Rak 2005) challenges the notion that “the individual blogger is assumed to be singular, unique, and (...) to be telling the truth about themselves and their opinions” (Rak 2005: 174). While through the process of writing the case study I have thus become suspicious of the desire for an “authentic” subject that truthfully represents themselves on their blog, I do not mean to suggest that online presence is free floating and necessarily anonymous, as numerous contexts in which such online presence corresponds to the personal, professional or political representation of persons, groups of persons or institutions show (Rak 2005). I argue, however, that the desire to identify and authenticate a unified subject behind a blog like *Bhagyawati* resonates with the concerns chapter four has discussed in relation to intersectional theory. If an emphasis on particular intersections risks always already limiting the “eligibility” for intersectional analysis to particularly marked subjects, usually coinciding with racialised, ethnic, gendered and sexualised difference, the desire to attach a particular kind of subject to the curation of particular kinds of content presumes a similar knowability. Approaching *Bhagyawati* as an instance of transnationality, for example, bears the risk of specifically looking for manifestations of Britishness and of Asianness. Such an approach is easily imaginable, and might yield a neat category tree potentially consisting of British, Asian, Both, and Other, which might indeed be attributable to a large number of posts on the Tumblr with relative ease. Resisting such pre-defined categories of analysis hopes to supplement the transnational with fleeting attach-

ments that might escape configurations of gender, race, class, or sexuality that layering the transnational with an intersectional lens might address. While Asianness appears in a variety of dimensions (politics, current affairs, cinema, art or fashion, to name just a few), and the British is similarly discernible (for example in references to place, politics, current affairs, or even the weather), transnationality on *Bhagyawati* initially appears less contoured. After all, many other places, people, and art from cultures neither identified as Asian or British (for example from a variety of African and continental European cultures) are curated alongside and entangled with the British, the Asian, as well as entries without a clear place reference. A nostalgic feel and multiple femininities have emerged from the coding process (see chapter five) as the most persuasive aesthetic themes on *Bhagyawati*. This choice in themes to be pursued in more depth than others in an illustrative rather than intrinsic case study (Stake 1995; Thomas 2011) that is limited in scope is based on the work those themes are deemed to do for the conversation this case study forms part of, and their prevalence on the blog. Given the primary purpose of engaging in dialogue with the theoretical lens emerging from part I of the thesis, rather than contributing empirically to cybicultural studies and/or South Asian studies, nostalgia and femininities thus work as catalysts in the queer intersectional discussion of transnational becomings on Tumblr.

*Bhagyawati* simultaneously imagines (locates, collects, filters and selects content worthy of reblogging) and images (i.e. the visual result of that work) transnational becomings by creatively curating an apparently eclectic array of topics and styles. Western and Asian fashion appears alongside a subtly articulated religious pluralism and feminist politics; vintage Bollywood intermingles with advocacy for Palestine; nature photography, interspersed with excerpts from romantic poetry and random quotes from across the interwebs joins ethnographic curiosity about far away peoples. Furthermore, *Bhagyawati*'s sense for affective imagery and melancholic mood (less generously perhaps qualified as sulkiness), and a seeming desire to portray art and beauty with a sense of sophistication, are striking – as is the blog's incessant articulation of femininity, and the apparent yearning for a vintage quality to its imag(in)ings. The latter translates into the first of two overarching aesthetic themes that I now engage with in more detail: the nostalgic feel that the Tumblr evokes across a wide variety of content. This dimension of *Bhagyawati* thus visually aligns itself with a range of other youth blogs that Munteanu (2011) has found to nostalgically (and vicariously) construct a pastness that to the bloggers is immaterial in that it can neither be experienced nor remembered first hand. Nostalgia in this sense is “understood as a sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the past” (Munteanu 2011: 104).

In *Bhagyawati*'s nostalgia the temporal and the spatial seem to overlap at times. The nostalgia Gopal (2004: 220) describes as "operationalized by time rather than space" and thus as a temporal "look backward" and "a product of linear time" is readily identifiable on the blog, for instance in depictions of classical Mughal art, black and white portraits, and photographs of landscapes and cities of times past, but also in Bollywood posters, animated gifs or stills from films dating back to earlier decades. This quite literally backward looking nostalgic longing however, is by far not exhaustive. It is joined by a more lateral version of nostalgia, a look sideways rather than purely backwards expressed through vintage aesthetics. While Gopal identifies the immigrant "as the perfect vehicle for the making of the nostalgic subject" (2004: 220), one that occasionally spatially returns "home" to a place that is temporally never quite as remembered, *Bhagyawati* imag(in)es transnational becoming on a different register. Detached from immigration and its linear connotations of progress (Gopal 2004: 220), its nostalgia operates both ways. It thus simultaneously produces pastness and placeness vicariously, where both cannot be returned to, cannot be experienced first-hand in the ways previous generations in time as well as previous/present generations in particular places have been/are part of the times and places imag(in)ed. The collage of *Bombay to Goa*<sup>7</sup> (Ramanathan 1972) memorabilia in Figure 6 is just one amongst

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<sup>7</sup> *Bombay to Goa* is a 1972 action comedy starring Bollywood star Amitabh Bachchan in his first lead role. A plot summary is available from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0068305/>.

many instances illustrating this overlap between nostalgic reference to time as well as place. The images in the collage (like the film they depict) are set in the early 1970s and invoke widely shared cultural references and aesthetics, for instance of hairstyles and fashion, that are visually distinct from contemporary cultural production. At the same time, this straightforward temporal reference is supplemented by a multi-layered notion of place/time. On the one hand, and in addition to the immediate recognisability of the imagery to Bollywood enthusiasts, the literal reference to the locations Bombay and Goa and to the journey between the two that the posters seem to promise, convey a sense of place that makes the post easily locatable on a map regardless of one's subcontinental film savviness. On the other hand, however, this uncomplicated placeness is, well, complicated by the fact that the place name Bombay carries connotations by far exceeding simple geographic location. It not only has long since been renamed to Mumbai, turning Bombay into a signifier of place and time simultaneously, but is in itself entangled in complicated legacies of (post)coloniality.

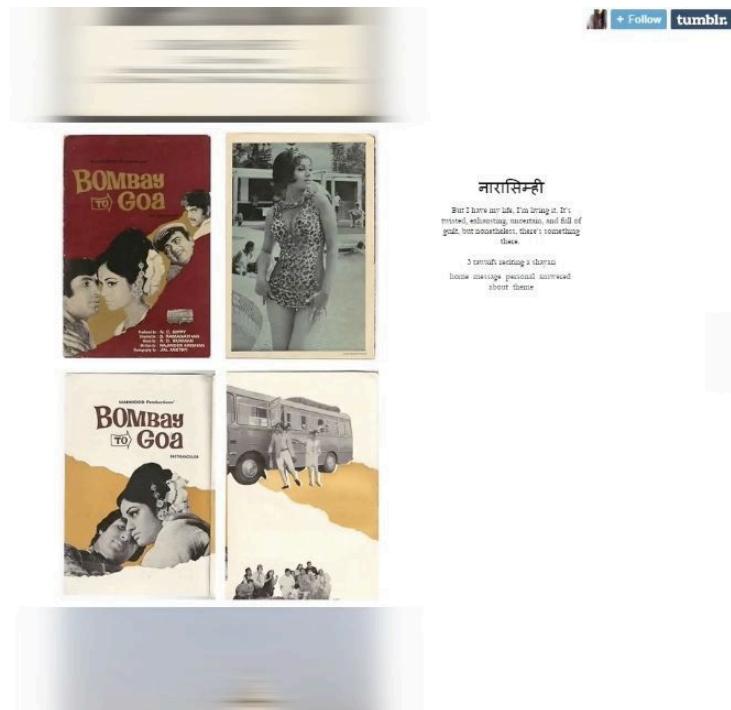


Figure 6 - Screenshot *Bomay to Goa* collage

Boym usefully distinguishes between restorative and reflective nostalgia. While restorative nostalgia captures the longing for a mythical “return to origins”, or, conceivably, a material return to mythical homelands, and is thus “at the core of recent national and religious revivals” (2007: 13), reflective nostalgia “does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones” (2007: 13). The two modes of nostalgia “might overlap in their frames of reference but do not coincide in their narratives and plots of identity” (2007: 15). The reference to Bombay in Figure 6 can potentially be read as both or either. It invokes Bombay the city (that cannot be returned to) as well as the time when Bombay was indeed the name of a city. It thus references different time zones in more than one way, and similarly, narratives that touch upon the glamour of a genre, a decade,

two places, but equally revolve around complicated politics of place and colonial time. Boym furthermore characterises reflective nostalgia as “about taking time out of time and about grasping the fleeting present”, as “ironic and humorous”, and as “inconclusive, and fragmentary” (2007: 14-15). It is thus in its reflective more so than in its restorative mode that nostalgia permeates *Bhagyawati*, and that the myriad looks sideways become visible. Many contributions are indeed humorous or satirical, others constitute fragments of history, fragments of films, and all remain inevitably inconclusive as rarely narrated into a particular context. They are inconclusive furthermore, because *Bhagyawati* is not linear in its curation and does not have a stated aim or topic that the content revolves around. It is an assemblage of fleeting moments in time and in space, defying linear logics in both. This impression is exacerbated by the lack of archive, navigation, and search functions on the blog’s frontpage. A post quite literally turns into a fleeting moment as finding it again just a few months later is an exercise of scrolling back (or down) along not visibly dated or archived posts. For the spectator/reader these fleeting moments resemble sideway glances, for without further pursuing the original source of the post (where possible) it often remains unclear where/when it refers to. One is left with a sense of other place or other time or both, yet without conclusive certainty about where exactly *Bhagyawati* images and what is nostalgically imagined. Some seeming vintage imagery turns out to stem from contemporary films or sepia filtered contemporary photography in an imitated

vintage style. The knowability is therefore to a certain extent limited, which productively extends the question of authenticity, respectively the desire for it, which I have briefly raised regarding the doer/blogger behind the deed/blog, to the content of the blog. While it is possible, in some cases, to trace the content to its original source online, that may or may not coincide with where the image originates and says nothing at all about what is being *imagined* by curating a particular piece of content at a particular moment and alongside particular others on *Bhagyawati*. It is thus not so much that where it originates does not matter, but more that how it matters is not necessarily tethered to its origin online or off. At the same time, some sideway glances call for a double take, for a post might evoke nostalgia in seeming reference to times past where the lines between pastness and otherness become blurred, bearing a risk of nostalgically romanticising peoples and places, thus evoking pastness in the contemporary other.

Imaging and imagining in the composite form of imag(in)ing in which I am using it here expresses the inseparability of the two in a context like Tumblr, where each image not only literally portrays an image of sorts to an audience but is also the result of imaginative labour whereby the image is found, vetted, selected, and reblogged. Imagination can usefully be understood

as a time-space of emergence, not the before but the yet to come. One that has been neglected, certainly, but one that comes into existence through certain conditions of possibility, that require squeezing through the blockages of certainty and pushing through the barricades of normativity. (Latimer and Skeggs 2011: 406)

Imagining as a transnational practice that bears the potential of subversion and transformation (Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert 2012: 147) thus extends to imag(in)ings on *Bhagyawati*. It surfaces with the imag(in)ed nostalgia across the blog, through its entangled temporality and spatiality as well as its non-linear transnationality that references here, there, elsewhere, everywhere as well as nowhere in particular. The challenges to the knowability of the blogging subject and the curated content discussed here hope to perforate certainty where knowledge productions on online transnational becomings are concerned. While this chapter is an attempt at thinking queer intersectionally, and thus at thinking laterally, at thinking diffuse categories together and through one another, it is by the means of the second aesthetic theme that permeates *Bhagyawati*, multiple femininities, that the ways in which transnational imag(in)ings relate to, and push “through the barricades of” (Latimer and Skeggs 2011: 406) normativities become salient.

Again, it is not as a readily defined attribute or tag attached to particular posts that femininities are so pertinent, but as cutting across a wide range of different posts. It is thus not *either* nostalgia *or* femininities that are curated but *both and* much more. The entanglements between the two overarching

themes I discuss in this chapter become particularly striking in posts that portray vintage Bollywood imagery and fashion styles. Cyber femininities, defined by Abidin and Thompson as “the portrayal and performance of female gender as mediated via the Internet and digital technologies” (2012: 467) are imag(in)ed as multiple and multi-layered. In the following figures, instead of masking the surrounding posts, like I have done in some of the other illustrations in this chapter to maintain the focus on a particular contribution, I show two excerpts of vintage femininity with its nostalgic flair alongside the surrounding content as a case in point for the multiple femininities curated across the blog. In addition to the entanglements between nostalgia and femininities, they illustrate the hybrid nature of *imag(in)ing into becoming* that I have alluded to earlier, as well as examples of the multiple femininities on *Bhagyawati* that the remainder of this section takes to.

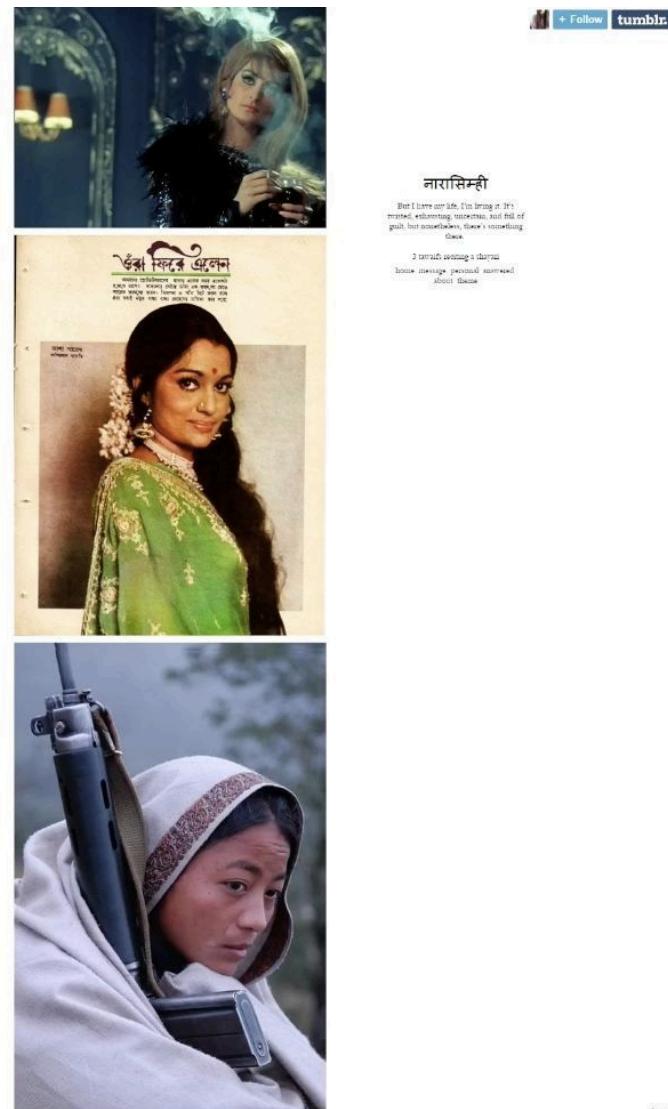


Figure 7 - Screenshot of multiple femininities

The post at the centre of Figure 7, as well as the one at the bottom of Figure 8, depict South Asian fashion styles from (unspecified) past decades. In Figure 7 it is as much the foregrounded portrait as the fact that it is visibly a photo of a slightly yellowed magazine page that produce its nostalgic pastness – a perception that may well shift for someone who is able to read the caption on the top of the page. Both figures taken together and in their entirety illustrate the seamlessness with which *Bhagyawati* curates content, providing neither context information nor commentary. It is thus the content itself

and the themes that emerge from the entanglements within as well as between such posts that constitute the substance of the *curating into becoming* that takes place on the blog.

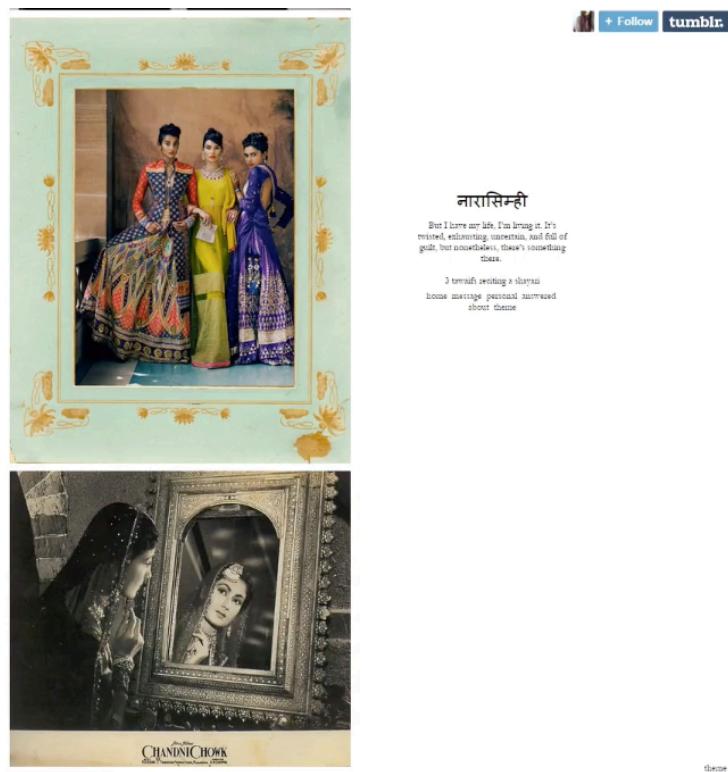


Figure 8 - Screenshot nostalgic and contemporary femininities

The bottom post in Figure 8 illustrates how *Bhagyawati* conveys reflective nostalgia through the representation of nostalgic femininity, in other words how nostalgia and femininities blur into one another. The sepia tone of the image, the antique/retro detailing of the mirror, the vintage style and somewhat modest sensuality the image portrays through its look and feel can be found time and again on the Tumblr. Simultaneously, the post contains a sideways glance to place, to Chandni Chowk, a historical but presently still operative market district in Old Delhi. Such posts, alongside contemporary

women's attire such as the extravagant dresses showcased in the top post in Figure 8, as well as Bollywood finery, are frequent and contribute prominently to the overall visual feel of the blog. Despite their compliance with and celebration of aesthetic qualities conventionally attributed to the feminine – for instance elegance, beauty and glamour – the femininities curated on *Bhagyawati* do not fit snugly within the notion of emphasised femininity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Connell 1987) defined as a “kind of femininity [that] is performed, and performed especially to men” and their desires (Connell 1987: 188). It is, for instance, far from obvious who the intended audience of the sensual hyperfemininity that often conveys a sense of female homosociality is. While emphasised femininity, in Connell’s definition is always oriented within a heterosexual matrix where the recipients of femininity, so to speak, are men, *Bhagyawati*’s femininities trouble an immediate mapping onto such a grid. While visually representing emphasised femininity, the Tumblr does not sustain the concept in the sense of “practice that prevents other models of femininity gaining cultural articulation” (Connell 1987: 188). The ways in which multiple and multi-layered femininities are curated on *Bhagyawati* suggest rather the opposite, yet without succumbing to a dichotomy between emphasised femininity and what Schippers has called “pariah femininities” deemed in a way “contaminating to the relationship between masculinity and femininity” (Schippers 2007: 95). It is thus not emphasised femininity in opposition to or in competition with alternative femininities that *Bhagyawati* cu-

rates, but entanglements of multiple femininities. Most convey some characteristics that emphasise the conventionally feminine, while some emphasise alternative femininities through representation of characteristics that are not usually scripted/imaged as feminine. Two examples of such alternative imag(in)ings of femininity on *Bhagyawati* are recurring posts that represent women who smoke, and women who carry weapons, instances of both of which frame the depiction of nostalgic femininity shown in Figure 7.

Representations of smoking are far from associated with appropriate femininity, to borrow Dwyer's (1999) term. While the post in Figure 7 could be read as (nostalgically?) placing smoking in the past and giving it something of a vintage quality, the blog overall portrays retro imagery alongside contemporary images and animated gifs of both Western and Asian women who smoke. More strikingly in a quantitative sense, *Bhagyawati* expresses alternative femininities through a wide variety of posts that feature women bearing weapons. While the image in Figure 7 shows an ethnographic photograph of a Maoist guerrilla woman in 2005 (as a reverse image search reveals), the imagery around woman carrying (and/or using) weapons is not limited to a particular conflict or cause. Other weaponised imag(in)ings include retro styled film poster of 2014 Bollywood drama *Revolver Rani* (Kabir 2014), Palestinian woman fighters, armed women fighting in the Iran-Iraq war, stills from a range of Indian films depicting women with guns or knives, or art by con-

temporary Iranian visual artist Shirin Neshat, to name but a few. I hesitate to label this phenomenon because I do not wish to romanticise violence or portray its representation on *Bhagyawati* as somehow progressive, not least because I do not read the repeated occurrence of militant femininity on *Bhagyawati* as a call to arms or condoning militancy in any literal sense. Rather, I read it as a queer expression of militantly non-normative femininity that is curated unapologetically alongside other alternative femininities as if seeking to *not* make a point. The femininities on *Bhagyawati* are to a large extent of non-normative nature, as evidenced by the prominent representation of women engaged in activities and aesthetics not conventionally associated with appropriate femininity. This reading is further supported by the frequent overlap between emphasised and alternative femininities on the blog. Hijra femininities (Reddy 2005; Nanda 1999) are for instance represented alongside other femininities without qualifying them as Other, representing them as a spectacle, or exoticising their appearance as something more than femininity (or not quite femininity). While Hijra femininities constitute but a small fraction of imag(in)ed femininities on *Bhagyawati*, their unspectacular presence amongst a wide variety of femininities notably queers the attachment of femininities solely to (representations of) cisgendered women's bodies. Much more visually pronounced and frequent is the curation of Muslim femininities, more accurately described in this context as hijab femininities. With hijab femininities I on the one hand refer to the frequent representation

of veiled Muslim women, but also to a more diffuse aesthetics that draws heavily on the hijab in a range of contexts including fashion, art, portrait photography or historical content, seemingly without primary religious reference. As highlighted through the examples this chapter draws on, here too a marked overlap with nostalgia as well as with other alternative femininities can be observed. The figure of the hijabi is creatively imag(in)ed in ways that subvert the debates around the politics of the veil (Mirza 2013; Scott 2007; Abu-Lughod 2001). Ever so subtly, an anti-racist and anti-Islamophobic stance on Muslim femininities (Dwyer 1999; 2000) is taken, rather than explicitly advocating for anti-Islamophobic and anti-racist representations or condemning stereotypical ones. In placing hijab femininities alongside other (emphasised and alternative) femininities, such advocacy is pre-empted in the ways in which *Bhagyawati* imag(in)es femininities as multi-layered becomings.

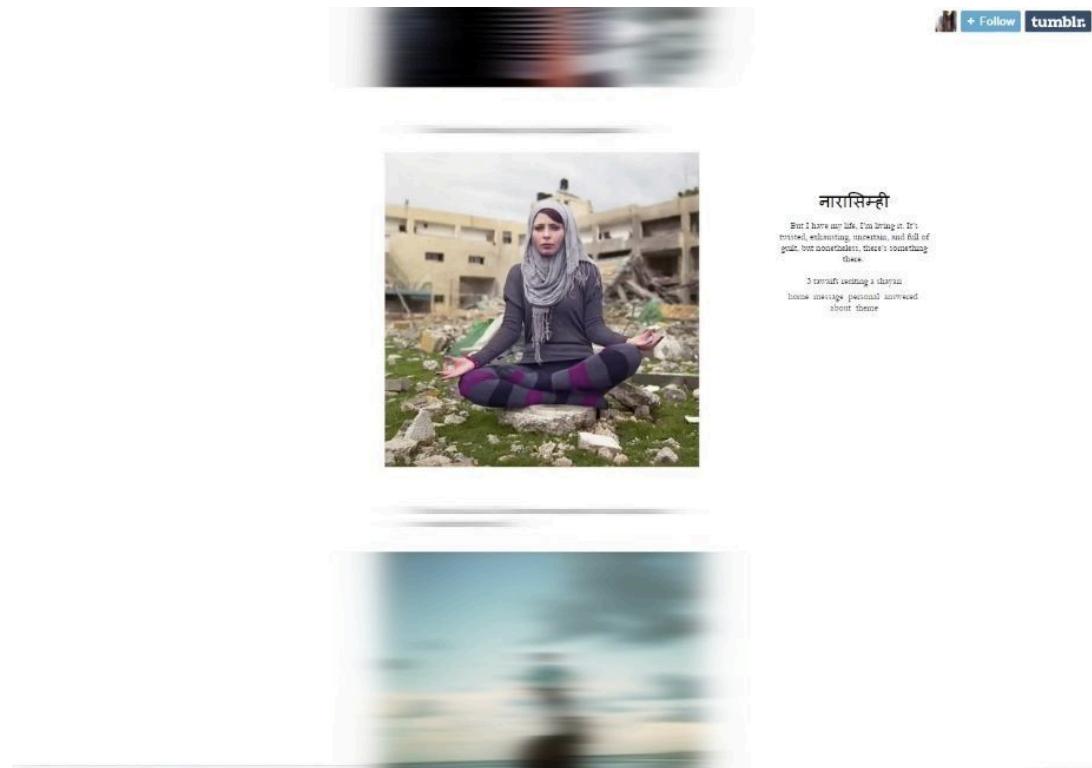


Figure 9 - Screenshot Hijab femininities

My reading of the visibility accorded to hijab femininities on *Bhagyawati* is, however, not primarily religiously inflected. While imaging the hijab undoubtedly carries its own referentiality to Islamic dress, imag(in)ined alongside and entangled with other femininities, alongside multiple cross-religious content, and juxtaposed with the blogger's self-professed atheism, the hijab becomes as much a marker of femininity than of religion. The example of hijab femininities in Figure 9 is perhaps not the most representative of the kinds of aesthetics imag(in)ed in this context, at least not in a quantitative sense, but it well illustrates the entangled referentiality I have tried to draw out in writing about hijab femininities. Conveying a fashionable hipster tonality that

simultaneously defies stereotypical representations of Muslim femininities, challenges preconceptions about modest Islamic dress, and references a choice of Buddhism and/or Hinduism and/or new age spirituality through its depiction of the lotus position, the post in Figure 9 firmly situates hijab femininities in the realm of fluid and multiple femininities imag(in)ed on *Bhagyawati*. Thus, without articulating overt critique or being explicitly political, the multiple and entangled ways in which those femininities are curated into becoming do take a stance – a stance against locating/locking hijab femininities in the politics of the veil, and a stance for multiple becomings.

Neither my use of femininities in the plural nor my tentative individual and collective naming of non-normative femininities intend to suggest a finite typology of particular femininities imag(in)ed on *Bhagyawati*. There is nothing finite, nothing discreet about the ways in which the femininities I have referred to in this chapter appear. On the contrary, the examples I discuss here illustrate the fluid and multiple becomings that are imag(in)ed through the curation of (plural) femininities, and how they entangle with a range of other differentiations, for instance with the nostalgic attachments discussed at some length above, but also with transnationality and other differentiations that matter. Thus what I have referred to as nostalgic femininity or alternative femininities do not identify empirical “types” of femininity to be excavated from Tumbler, or to be transported elsewhere, or to be qualita-

tively attached to Misha in an attempt to demystify the blogging subject. Taken together and juxtaposed with explicitly feminist content – such as portraying the “India needs feminism because...” photo campaign, a powerful poem against rape culture that was making the rounds on Tumblr, a homage to successful Asian women such as writer and activist Arundhati Roy, or a tribute to actress Zohra Sehgal shortly after her passing in July 2014 – the femininities imag(in)ed on *Bhagyawati* convey an understated yet unapologetic feminism, a feminism that need not explain its decidedly multiple, inclusive, and non-normative alignments.

### **Concluding remarks**

Looking at *Bhagyawati* queer intersectionally has provided an opportunity to explore how transnationality might emerge in different ways when not pre-supposed as a category of analysis in itself. This way of approaching the blog negates neither transnational imag(in)ings nor intersectional entanglements of the latter with, for instance, the gendered and racialized context it takes place in – after all, “the Internet is not *a* world; it’s part of *the* world” (Tufekci 2012: 14). In dialogue with the open conceptualisation of transnational space that chapter two has aligned this thesis with, it allows for a wide range of imag(in)ings to be taken into account when thinking of and producing knowledge in/on/through transnational spaces.

With the caveat of the tension between the selection of the material and themes represented in this chapter based on its situatedness in the British Asian transnational space, respectively its pertinence to the dialogue between case and object of study on the one hand, and this thesis' wider concerns with such ease in attributing transnationality on the other, my reading of *Bhagyawati* has attempted to refrain from imposing transnationality, Britishness or Asianness on the material *a priori*. This is not to suggest that transnationality is somehow absent from the blog, on the contrary. By not making it the starting point from which to analyse the Tumblr, however, it appears less distinctly marked and less explicitly defining of the kinds of becomings imag(in)ed on *Bhagyawati*. British Asian seems to make way for a more diffuse transnationalism that appears irreducible to either. *Bhagyawati* is, at times subtly and at others quite strikingly, infused with a transnationality imag(in)ed multiply and beyond itself. The blog for instance carefully crafts transnational femininities that span much more than Asian or British femininity; transnationality is ever-present within the nostalgia encountered on *Bhagyawati*; the imag(in)ing at work in curating content and thus materialising the blog constitutes a transnational practice in itself; and transnationality infuses some of the themes this chapter has only mentioned in passing. Through the multiple ways in which Bhagyawati imag(in)es transnationality differently, far beyond reference to two places, across time/place it thus constitutes its own version of a British Asian transnational space.

The ways in which transnationality at times seems to take a back seat in the analysis of the blog mirrors the shift I have pointed to earlier in this chapter from a keen scholarly interest in specifically *British* Asian offline communities to a more diffuse interest in digital diasporas or South Asian online communities and identities, letting the marker British drop slightly out of view. I suggest that this shift does not represent a sudden lack of interest in British Asian spaces, but is symptomatic of the questions around knowability and boundary marking this chapter as well as the thesis as a whole have been interested in. In knowledge productions in/on offline spaces it is widely accepted to demarcate communities based on ethnicity, migratory background or remote ancestry for transnational analysis, just as it seems widely accepted to mark particular bodies for analysis based on the intersections between race, gender, class or sexuality. When working with similar modes of knowledge production in/on online spaces, however, the problems with identifying and attributing such markers become more visible, not least due to the technological environment such spaces rely on – a server location or url cannot meaningfully represent the belongings of its users. This chapter has thus taken the tensions between research on online communities as separate/distinct from offline communities while also presupposing equivalence or overlap between the two based on geographic, cultural or ethnic markers as indicative of some of the wider questions of transnational becoming and presupposed categories of analysis that this thesis has engaged with.

This project has drawn on the notion of queering predominantly in its anti-normative incarnation (cf. Butler 1993; Warner 1993; Sedgwick 1990) that is indebted to wider poststructuralist critiques of identity categories and the subsequent shift to a more general politics of difference (cf. Jagose 1996). I have emphasised queering in verb-form, as a practice in relation to intersectional theory to draw attention to heteronormativity in knowledge productions and objects of study; to untether intersectionality from identity categories; and to extend the *doing* of intersectionality from the level of subject (Staunæs 2003) to knowledge productions<sup>8</sup>. In doing so, I have taken my cue from scholars who have noted the potential of queering beyond queer subjects (cf. Luibhéid 2008; Valocchi 2005; Sullivan 2003; Sedgwick 1990). In my queer intersectional reading of *Bhagyawati*, queer has thus specifically operated to queerly (dis)orient (Ahmed 2006) around the contents curated on the blog rather than to frame the blog as queer by excavating particularly queer moments.

Gross suggests that the Internet as a medium can be considered “somehow queer” because “there’s the disembodied performativity of cyberspace, the place where no one knows you’re a dog, or whatever you choose to present yourself as” (Gross 2007: vii). His statement, of course, is rather problematic in the sense that it glosses over online power relations; it uses being a

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<sup>8</sup> See chapter four for a detailed engagement with both, the general notion of queering this thesis draws on, and what the queering of intersectionality that underlies the analyses in this case study consists of.

dog as an analogy for non-normative gender and sexuality; and assumes “disembodied performativity” in a place where supposedly no one knows (or cares?), thus, again, hinting at a binary opposition between the digital and the real (where I will remain a dog). Nevertheless I would like to retain the notion of a tentative queerness inherent in the kind of environment an online platform like Tumblr provides for *Bhagyawati* – albeit for different reasons. Wight (2013) helpfully identifies the sense of place as well as the temporality that practices such as viewing, liking or sharing content produce as queer: “Normative senses of time are disrupted as bodies approach digital interfaces, creating digital place through interaction and experiences in the precreated digital interface in which they interact” (Wight 2013: 130-131). The content curation *Bhagyawati* engages in primarily consists of precisely such practices of viewing content on other blogs and the wider web, and of identifying content to share on the blog. It is thus not only through instances of imag(in)ing where normativities might be queered through the content as such – for example when non-normative femininities are represented (such as militant femininities or Hijra femininities) – but already by engaging in the very practice of imag(in)ing transnational becomings differently on the blog. Rather than following articulations of queerness on the blog, for instance in tracing instances where homosociality borders on homoeroticism to make a case for the queerness of *Bhagyawati* as such, attention is thus shifted to queering as practice, as queer intersectional *doing*. I read Mitra and Gajjala’s contention

that “online spaces somehow offer up zones for queer articulation” (2008: 402) not only in the sense of articulations of queerness, but equally in the sense of queerly articulating. The practice of imag(in)ing that this chapter has engaged with thus queerly articulates transnational becomings on *Bhagyawati*. Particularly the ways in which a reflective nostalgia (Boym 2007) with its temporal/spatial overlap permeates the blog, have illustrated the queer place/time configurations that Wight (2013) has attributed to the digital practices of viewing, sharing, or commenting that constitute the content curation *Bhagyawati* engages in.

My way of approaching *Bhagyawati*, by lurking on the Tumblr rather than approaching the blogger as a research participant, is related to the particular subject-object relations of this case study and the kind of reading/viewing this chapter has thus been interested in. This case study as engaged with different representational sites ascribed to a British Asian transnational space to extend and diffract (Barad 2007; Haraway 1997) the conceptual dialogue in part I of this thesis. In doing so, the focus has been on the curated content and a queer intersectional reading thereof rather than on the blogger’s own subject formation. Contacting the blogger to conduct an interview, engaging with Misha as a research participant, knowing whether in fact a young woman called Misha lives somewhere in London and curates *Bhagyawati*, or what her personal motivations behind her content choices are would have

shifted registers in terms of the kind and scale of questions posed, and caused ethical concerns in relation to the instrumental nature of this case study. The decision to refrain from contacting the blogger was informed by the research design of the case study, where the object of study remained the queer intersectional lens rather than aiming at a substantive contribution to scholarship on British Asian subjects or spaces (see also chapter five). In chapter eight I return to potential future directions a queer intersectional approach to trans-national becomings might be taken in, including projects that draw on interview or ethnographic data. The tension between subject and subjectlessness (O'Riordan 2007: 17) in the opening quote to this chapter thus not only applies to queer framings, but equally to the blog's becoming subject and subjectless as I navigate questions around the knowability/desire to know about an authentic and unified subject behind the blog, as well as to tension between the selection of a subject (of study) based on criteria that the object (of study) it is a case of challenges, which I also return to in chapter eight.

## **Chapter Eight: Conclusion**

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How does one become transnationally? This thesis has set out to conceptually explore this question through a dialogue between different disciplinary modes of knowledge production that have a vested, if not always explicit, interest in the kinds of subjects that undergo transnational becomings. Critical interventions into such knowledges have problematised uni-dimensional, essentialist and identitarian approaches, but have often had a partial impact on the mainstream(s) they interrogate. In embarking on a postdisciplinary project, my aim has thus been to engage a range of critical literatures in a dialogue about transnational becomings that has the potential to exceed particular modes of knowledge production within disciplines. In short, this thesis has thus brought the scholarships on transnationalism, intersectionality, and queer theory into conversation with one another and, in an attempt at integrating these literatures, proposed a queer intersectional approach to transnational becomings. What was initially imagined as a big(ger) project, with big

aims to contribute to theory and research, has, in its becoming thesis, turned into a somewhat different project, has turned on itself to become several minor points, scattered points that contribute queerly. These minor points do their best to live up to the standards of their own critique – an aspiration they can, however, only ever partially fulfil as any critical project is fraught with complicity in reproducing the power operating in that which it critiques (Grosz 1995). Postdisciplinarily reading the scholarly literatures and materials this thesis and its case study have engaged with through one another, reading against the grain, is not to proclaim grand theory or a new normative methodological framework for transnational theory and research. Rather, reading differently, reading different sets of scholarship together, allows for different connections, lets minor points speak to one another and become entangled through dialogue. For all the minor points, I nevertheless hope that, rather than suggesting they remain minor or become major, they have their contribution to make in their own locations. I hope, for instance, that this thesis contributes to critical identity fields (Wiegman 2012) like gender studies, queer studies, and transnational studies in reading them in dialogue and proposing ways in which, through one another, they not only have the potential to sound louder and echo farther (into their various mainstreams), but to operate as mutual correctives on one another's limitations. While this thesis arrives at this conclusion through its concern about the modes by which knowledge on the Other is produced, and through making some of those

modes its own object of study, my hope is that a similar postdisciplinary logic might be applied to a range of other objects of study. More immediately, this thesis speaks to research on transnational spaces and to intersectional theory in gender studies. It proposes that queering intersectionality allows for attention to as many differences as matter in a given context (one of which I have taken to be transnationality) without *a priori* marking particular bodies and subjects for intersectional analysis. Other locations emerge more tentatively through my discussion of queering as a postdisciplinary practice, and the queering potential of Postdisciplinarity proposed in chapter one and later in this chapter, through which I hope to participate in the wider conversations about cross-disciplinary modes of knowledge production. While engaging with transnational, gender, and queer studies, it is neither the transnational, gender nor queer as attributes or categories of analysis that became my primary focal point, but the dialogue between them and the means by which they might enhance one another. Drawing on gender theory and queer theory, part I of this thesis has thus proposed a dual move of intersectionalising the transnational and queering the intersectional. The question posed at the outset of this chapter then gradually turns into slightly different ones – how are transnational becomings represented in scholarly modes of knowledge production? What might representing them differently do? In what ways do critical scholarships engage one another in dialogue towards doing so?

Chapter one has offered a range of entry points to the dialogue(s) to follow in subsequent chapters. It has briefly introduced caught between cultures discourse and offered a preliminary reading of *Britz* and *Second Generation* that has followed a “paranoid” reading practice (Sedgwick 2003) based on such reductionist constructions to later inform the more extensive queer intersectional reading in chapter six. It has furthermore introduced the different literatures that have recurred as protagonists of the dialogue the remainder of the thesis attempted to stage, and outlined some of their productive gaps and overlaps. Chapter two has engaged with literatures in migration studies to align this thesis with theorisations of the transnational space as a porous and open-ended field. It has first delineated such conceptualisations of the transnational space from earlier approaches that tended to essentially transnationalise the subject through their emphasis on transnational attachments to two places and cross-border practices, and thus risked re-inscribing methodological nationalism in transnational research and muting the transnational subject in the process. In dialogue with feminist interventions into this body of scholarship, it becomes clear that transnationality is by no means the only difference that matters. Adjusting the frame to encompass the spaces transnationality takes place in rather than focus on normatively defined ethnic communities and/or nations allows for exploring the heterogeneity and multiplicity within such spaces. Chapter two has thus paved the way for the conceptual dialogue(s) to follow by aligning itself with fluid theorisations of

the transnational space as the spaces transnationality emerges in/through (Jackson et al. 2004; Rouse 1991); as exhibiting “third space” (Bhabha 1994) qualities while resisting the romanticisation of hybridity (Grewal and Kaplan 1994); and as detached from the act of migration (Jackson et al. 2004; Brah 1996). The kind of space chapter two constructs as this thesis’ field is thus particularly indebted to Brah’s (1996) theorisation of the “diaspora space” as inherently intersectional, multiple, and contested. Chapter three has turned the attention from the transnational space to the becoming of subjects in and through such spaces, and explored transnational becomings as material-discursive entanglements. It has thought of transnationality in terms of descent and emergence (Foucault 1984a) to allow for both, attention to a sense of transnationality that attaches to subjects through culture and kinship, and to the hybrid space that emerges anew through the transnational space that chapter two has outlined. This discussion thus accounts for the specifically transnational without presupposing an essentialised transnationality. Intersectionalising the transnational then understands this transnationality as one potential difference that matters amongst many others, and focuses attention on discourses and power relations around gender, class, race, sexuality *etc.* in addition to transnationality. While the need for an intersectional analysis of transnational spaces thus emerges from both, chapter two and three, chapter four proceeds with a discussion of queering in relation to intersectionality, and concludes part I of the thesis. It problematises some ways in which inter-

sectionality conflates categories of analysis with identity categories, as well as its tendency to think around (check)lists of differences that mark particular (gendered and racialised) subjects as “eligible” for intersectional analysis. The chapter stages a dialogue between queer theory and intersectionality and positions the two sets of scholarship as mutually corrective towards a situated analysis of the becoming of subjects in and through the transnational space, to then extrapolate a queered intersectionality, where queering is used as a (dis)orientation (Ahmed 2006) around objects of study, to the transnational space. A queer intersectional lens challenges not only the heteronormative assumptions underlying most transnational (and some intersectional) research, but equally mitigates against the risks that intersectionality’s tether to identity categories and check-list like approaches to differences that matter bear. The *doing* of intersectionality (Staunæs 2003), chapter four has suggested, might thus be extended from the subject level to the level of knowledge productions. Part II of this thesis has then engaged in an illustrative, or instrumental in Stake’s (1995) terminology, case study that reads scholarly representations of the British Asian transnational space, the television dramas *Britz* and *Second Generation*, and the Tumblr *Bhagyawati* through this queer intersectional lens. The relationship between the subject and object of this case study (Thomas 2011; Stake 1995), as chapter five has explained, are such that the queer intersectional approach to transnational becomings that part I of the thesis has explored remained the object of study throughout, while the British Asian

transnational space was considered its subject, a case through which to investigate this object of study.

In this concluding chapter, I go on to reflect further on some lessons learned from the case study in relation to a queer intersectional approach to transnational becomings. To this end, the chapter revisits moments in my engagement with *Britz*, *Second Generation*, and the Tumblr *Bhagyawati* where the material and/or my readings of it speak up in the conceptual dialogue between transnationality, intersectionality and queering, and thus extend it productively to include the relations between object and subject of the case study. Next, the chapter turns to some limitations of this project and thinks about the extent to which it has been able to meet its initial aims. I furthermore return to queering to critically reflect on some of its (political) implications, and to its relationship with the postdisciplinary methodology chapter one has discussed. Finally, informed by the lessons and limitations, the chapter thinks about potential future avenues for a queer intersectional lens, both in terms of additional transnational (and other) spaces and subjects that might be explored queer intersectionally and in terms of the directions queering as a postdisciplinary practice might be taken in.

## Lessons from the case study

The case study in part II of this thesis has engaged with scholarly representations on British Asians, with the Channel 4 dramas *Britz* and *Second Generation*, and with the Tumblr *Bhagyawati* separately. The purpose of these queer intersectional engagements with the British Asian transnational representational space has been to place the subject of study (the case) in dialogue with the object of study (the queer intersectional approach to transnational becomings). Here, I would like to take a step back and think about some ways in which the subject has engaged the object and speaks back to it – an endeavour that continues in the following section where I engage with the limitations of the project.

Taken together, the chapters in part II operate to challenge modes of knowledge production that take particular intersections, particular places, particularly marked bodies and their representation as the (taken for granted) starting point for analytical engagement. As such, the dialogue between the films and the blog extends beyond the anecdotal instance where *Bhagyawati* curates a series of photos featuring Riz Ahmed, the actor who plays Sohail in *Britz*, or some topical overlap between my queer intersectional readings where queer seems to inadvertently attach itself to violent potentialities (be that militant femininities or Nasima's becoming Shahida) and the norms they quietly disrupt. Throughout the process of writing the case study, which as I

have explained in chapter five I have treated as an integral part of my analysis, the moments of friction where the archive seems to talk back to the theoretical explorations in part I of this thesis have been the most productive. In other words, in its own becoming(s), the case study reveals a set of related, if not entangled, tensions that engage a queer intersectional approach to transnational becomings in dialogue.

At the heart of the case study has been a tension around identifying the British Asian transnational space as its subject, as a “case of” transnational becoming. While chapter five has argued that this particular space is a paradigmatic case through which to discuss its object of study, a queer intersectional approach to transnational subjects problematises the markers by which boundaries around such spaces, cases, and subjects — both, transnational subjects and subjects of study — are drawn, and my choice of case is complicit in relying on precisely such boundary markers (see also below). This tension cannot be fully resolved here, and is an important instance in which the case and its archive talk back to the theoretical considerations in part one of this thesis. It also constitutes a vital part of the wider conversation this thesis takes part in, and foreshadows other instances where the case study productively engages the queer intersectional approach to transnational becomings. I have closed chapter seven by contending that the tension between subject/subjectless O’Riordan (2007), referenced in the chapter’s opening quote, is

not limited to queer framings, but equally applies to the blog/blogger's becoming subject and subjectless through her imag(in)ings (and my analysis). In addition, this tension extends queerly to the subject/object relations of this thesis as a whole and entangles with a related tension between a critique of digital dualism (Jurgenson 2012) and the questions around knowability of the blogging subject that chapter seven has raised. Indeed, based on the exploration of *Britz* and *Second Generation* in chapter six, as well as *Bhagyawati* in chapter seven, I suggest that the desire to resolve these tensions is symptomatic of modes of knowledge production I hope to queer in the first place. Particularly chapter seven has thus walked a tightrope between online performativity (Boyd 2006; Rak 2005; Sundén 2003: 13) that I have thought of in terms of curating oneself into becoming through the dual notion of imag(in)ing on the one hand, and a questioning stance on the knowability of the blogging subject, of the doer behind the deed (Butler 1990) on the other. Thus, while I have been critical of scholarship that views the online and the offline as two separate/separable worlds and perceive them as intimately linked and entangled instead (Tufekci 2013; Jurgenson 2012), I have been equally critical of modes of knowledge production that assume a 1:1 overlap between online/offline communities in terms of who participates in "virtual" spaces like digital diasporas based on markers such as ethnicity or national belonging. Neither presuming a divide between the virtual and the real nor taking "belonging" to an online space for granted by virtue of offline identity

markers does not amount to an instance of doublethink, but points to a productive tension that I characterise as full of queer potential. It disrupts not only the online/offline binary but equally any comfortable either/or division between the two ends of that seeming contradiction in favour of a both/and stance. For example, the responses to user questions and brief notes of original content on *Bhagyawati* show the blogger engaging in what seems like the processing of everyday issues around family, health or education. Read through the questions around knowability, it is of limited importance whether such accounts are fictional or non-fictional imag(in)ings. Assuming a bound subject that truthfully represents herself online, returns me to the parallels between the ways in which chapter seven has questioned the notion of online communities that form digital diasporas by virtue of participating in particular activities on particular servers based on presumed (offline) identity markers, and the critique this thesis formulates in terms of marking particular bodies as eligible for particular kinds of analyses – be they transnational, intersectional (marked by specific intersections, quite often brown women) or in this particular case an “authentic” or “real” young British Asian woman who blogs. The questions around knowability that my analysis of *Bhagyawati* has encountered, and the problems with presuming a (particular) blogger behind the blog, have thus in some ways brought me full circle and mirror the concerns part I of this thesis has brought forward where neither transnationality (chapter two) nor any number of other pre-defined differences that matter

(chapter four) suffice to capture the becoming of transnational subjects, nor should they. Read queer intersectionally, these tensions and the moments from which they arise constitute the subject/object relations of the case study – respectively the modes by which the case engages the queer intersectional lens. I return to the tension between choosing a case and deconstructing the terms its selection, and how it simultaneously points to the limitations of this project that the next section turns to.

While part I of the thesis, particularly chapter three, has emphasised material-discursive entanglements in the becoming of transnational subjects, the analyses in the case study have only very marginally touched upon materiality. Drawing on the discursive methods outlined in chapter five has limited my engagement with the inseparability of discourse and the material body where “materiality is discursive (...), just as discursive practices are always already material” (Barad 2003: 822) in the case study. While the entangled nature of matter and meaning (Barad 2007) has briefly surfaced in chapter six where I have engaged with Nasima’s becoming Shahida, other opportunities to return to these matter(ing)s have fallen victim to the limitations in scope. The technologically advanced control rooms that both Nasima and Sohail encounter, for instance, offer an additional instance in *Britz* that lends itself to a discussion of the ways in which the drama constructs transnational space as a configuration of “spacetimematter” (Barad 2007, 2001), “reconfig-

ured in the (re)making of material-discursive boundaries and their constitutive exclusions" (Barad 2001: 90, see also chapter three). Chapter six has referenced both, Sohail's introduction to the high-tech surveillance environment (see chapter six, figure 2) his new workplace relies on, and the equally high-tech control room Nasima encounters at her training facility in Pakistan (see chapter six, figure 3) as indicative of the gradually merging transnational space(s) the protagonists both inhabit and constitute. While their encounters with these transnational technologies take place in seemingly separate spheres, separated by geographical place and diametrically opposed ideologies, chapter six has traced the unravelling of the two sides these technologies (not least visually) represent. The human bodies that create, operate, trace, rely on, and evade the computers, data, phones and networks in *Britz* could thus additionally be read as intra-acting (Barad 2007) with the transnational space – itself an entanglement of discourse and matter, as chapter three has suggested. The wire-tap that records Nasima and Matloob's conversation at their safe house for instance, and the technology used by Sohail's colleagues at the security service to "clean" the sound of music and running water used to conceal their voices off the recording, are examples of how these technologies, entangled with their human makers/users, may temporarily take on opposite meanings (here tracking versus evading surveillance) yet contribute to materialising the same transnational space and subjects. Through these techno-human entanglements, *Britz* thus represents the slippages between "trans-

national, hypertechnologized, shifting terror network[s]" on the one hand, and the "perverse subjective, affective, and disciplinary forms (in)adequate to the new security state" (Puar and Rai 2004: 90) on the other, as co-constitutive of a material-discursive configuration of the transnational space that intra-acts (Barad 2007) with Nasima, with Sohail and with both of their wider counter(terror) networks. In this sense, Sohail and Nasima's transnational becomings take place through their entanglement within/with the transnational space they simultaneously inhabit, constitute, and are (partially) constituted by.

### **Limitations of the project**

As the previous section foreshadows, some of the tensions I draw on as productive lessons from the case study simultaneously constitute limitations of the thesis. Selecting/constructing the British Asian transnational space as paradigmatic subject for the purpose of diffracting a queer intersectional approach as the object of an instrumental case study, for instance, precluded other considerations in the choice of case. How might the dialogue between object and subject of the case study have differed, had I opted for a less paradigmatic case, one that might have "illuminate[d] the object by virtue of its difference, its *outlier* status" (Thomas 2011: 514, original emphasis) instead?

While a valid choice in the sense that the sheer wealth of scholarly and cultural productions available for analysis render the British Asian transnational space a paradigmatic subject of study, its validity relies on the problematic racialised ways in which “minority discourse’ becomes a hot topic” (Chow 1993: 109) for scholarly inquiry (see also chapter one). The mechanisms that construct particular spaces, rather than others, available to research and transnational framing are far from neutral. For all its investment in critiquing modes of knowledge production that all too easily attach to racialised bodies, this project is by design complicit in some of the very same “stickiness” and cannot position itself “beyond or outside, the fantasy of a position insulated from what it criticises” (Grosz 1995: 62). This unease trickles down from the selection of the case to the choice of the particular materials for analysis, and to the moments and instances within those materials that my writing of the case study (as part of the analytical process) has then focused on. The choice of materials within the case study (see chapter five), for instance, were informed by ongoing work on part I of the thesis as well as the instrumental positioning of the case study within the project. They were, in other words, selected partially because they were deemed rich instances through which to discuss a queer intersectional approach to transnational becomings, and thus almost by default already provide starting points for the modes of inquiry that a queer intersectional lens asks for.

In my writing of the case study, then, my engagement with the material remained tethered to the transnational becoming of post-migrant subjects. It was perhaps more concerned with working through and illustrating the critical interventions a queer intersectional approach strives for, than with providing a radically different kind of analysis that (more tacitly) takes the conceptual critiques of part I on board in its queer intersectional reading of the dramas and the blog. Chapter two has aligned this thesis with theorisations of the transnational space as multiple, porous, and decoupled from migration, and draws on Brah's conceptual "diaspora space" where "AfricanCaribbean, Irish, Asian, Jewish and other diasporas intersect among themselves as well as with the entity constructed as 'Englishness', thoroughly re-inscribing it in the process" (Brah 1996: 205). Throughout the case study, however – critical engagement with the terminology of British Asian and readings against subjects' reduction to transnationality notwithstanding – the analysis' own continued attachment to migrant/post-migrant subjects, to the detriment of others who participate in the same space, has largely gone unchallenged. To account for the transnational space as productive of and produced through all its subjects, and thus to more fully build on the theorisations of the transnational space as porous, multiple, and decoupled from migration that chapter two aligns itself with, the case study could have focused more attention on characters that are not ethnically coded as Asian, and the ways in which they too become through the British Asian transnational space

and participate in its co-constitution. Heere's fiancé Jack comes to mind, who at the outset of Second Generation figures as the intermediary who introduces Heere to the British Asian space the remainder of the drama is set in. Or, Nasima's boyfriend Jude in *Britz*, a character that might be read as implicated in the representation of her family as controlling and patriarchal that the drama's plot twist relies on, as well as in the transnational space(s) that converge through Sohail and Nasima's stories. My focus in chapter six has been on the latter, on how the "sides" the protagonists initially represent gradually unravel and become constitutive of one and the same transnational space. In this very context, it would have been instructive to focus the analysis more closely on how Sohail's colleagues at MI5 (or the security apparatus in itself) produce/are produced in intra-action with the transnational space that emerges through an ongoing "war on terror", and the re-configurations of "spacetimematter" (Barad 2007, 2001) that this entails. On a closely related note, I have repeatedly drawn on Barad (2007, 2001) and relied on her work for its theorisation of material-discursive entanglements and intra-action, but have been much less attentive to the ways in which time and temporalities figure in such "spacetimematter" entanglements. The case study could, for instance, have taken its cue from the emergence of temporality in chapter seven, where my reading of *Bhagyawati* has posited the nostalgia imag(in)ed on Bhagyawati as overlapping temporally/spatially, to add another layer to the discussion. Exploring temporalities further, not only in relation to *Bhagyawati*,

but also in my reading of *Second Generation* and *Britz* in chapter six, and in relation to the wider dialogue between subject and object of the case study, might have provided an additional instance where the material speaks back to the queer intersectional lens – particularly considering that the two dramas were produced (and set in) pre- respectively post- 7/7 contexts. With hindsight, I wonder on what terms the discussion of temporalities would, through the case, have left its mark on the conceptual dialogue and thus the queer intersectional lens in part I of the thesis.

### **Queering as a postdisciplinary practice**

This section extends a few concluding thoughts to queering, its political implications, and the relationship between queering and the postdisciplinarity I have introduced in chapter one. This thesis has posited queer/queering as an intervention into knowledge productions that challenges (hetero)normativities and binary thinking, to “disturb the order of things” (Ahmed 2006: 161) and spin queer outwards (Sedgwick 1994: 8). It has viewed the practice of conceptually exploring the resulting dialogue between queer, intersectional and transnational, and the *doing* of (queer) intersectionality, as a political practice. The dialogue between different sets of scholarship that this project has engaged is political in more ways than one: knowledge production

is in itself political (Harding 1991; Haraway 1988) and thus is by extension my engagement with the modes by which knowledge on transnational subjects is produced; but also in the sense that the literatures I have engaged with, have contributed significantly to feminist, anti-racist, and anti-homophobic scholarship and politics, and continue to do so. As a means of integrating the critical literatures I have endeavoured to read through one another, this thesis has proposed a queer intersectional lens on transnational becomings. I have taken a postdisciplinary approach to reading/thinking across critical sub-disciplines, not least in an attempt at harnessing what emerges as their joint potential to be heard closer to the mainstreams they address. The ways in which I thus consider my project a deeply political one seems, at times, at odds with arguments that ask for a de-centring of the analysis, the destabilisation of essentialising categories, with arguments that are suspicious of an intersectionality that marks particularly gendered, racialised or sexed bodies out for research, as well as with arguments that extend queering beyond queer subjects. As I have hinted at throughout the thesis, however, my work concedes the ongoing political importance of working with and mobilising along the very same categories that warrant caution in scholarly engagement. Putting queering to work beyond queer subjects, for instance, does not negate the continued importance of queer politics (and scholarships) that continue to mobilise against ongoing heterosexism and homophobia and organise around queer in ways that tether more immediately to sexualities, LGBT identities, or even under-

stand queer as an identity in itself. The work that queer migration scholarship does in relation to queer migrants is in itself valuable and works towards covering an under-researched and under-theorised aspect of migrations and border politics. The work it does in terms of drawing attention to how sexualities matter to migratory processes, to queer asylum, to queer migrants, should by no means be factored out in favour of a more diffuse anti-normativity and other queering moves. It is, however, this same body of scholarship that critically advocates for attention to intersectional, anti-racist and anti-imperialist analyses in migration research, and that argues that queer methodologies need not be limited to the study of queer subjects, but can be used as an instrument to explore how normativities play a role in producing not only the queer but others who become normalised through the same discourses. This dual trajectory illustrates how queering is more than a zero-sum game in which the latter might take queer away from the former. My engagement with intersectionality in chapter three, to provide a second example, positions itself on the nexus between anti- and intra-categorical (McCall 2005) terms to simultaneously challenge (identity) categorical orderliness as such *and* acknowledge an ongoing need to work with those same categories where they structure the lives of some more so than of others. While a queer intersectional lens favours an open-ended approach that makes an effort to not presuppose the categories through which to investigate its subjects, it has to remain attentive to race-, sex- and other -isms to retain its critical currency. It is

in this vein that chapter four has mobilised intersectionality and queer theory as mutually corrective tools (Haschemi et al. 2011; Taylor et al. 2011; Dietze et al. 2007) to keep one another's potential blind spots in check, and to remain attentive to "the other question" (Matsuda 1991). At the same time, however, I am mindful of Butler's contention that "[t]he deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated" (Butler 1990: 203). This project thus sees intrinsic political value in critically thinking about scholarly modes of producing knowledge – including the –isms they may inadvertently reproduce – and how to, on the one hand, partially mitigate against this risk, while amplifying their critical voice through mutual dialogue on the other.

To further reflect on the ways this thesis has put queer to work, I briefly return to the relationship between queering and postdisciplinarity. Postdisciplinary modes of knowledge production open up spaces for thinking about the ways in which we produce knowledge across disciplines without being disciplined, and thus challenges disciplines and their modernist understandings of expert knowledges and received paradigms. Notions of partiality, such as Haraway's "situated knowledges" (1988) or Braidotti's "nomadic style" (1994) are foregrounded and objects of study are not limited by the kinds of questions that can be asked, nor by the ways of answering them that disciplinary boundaries prescribe. The focus thus shifts from disciplines and

fields to objects of study instead, to following the questions those objects of study raise, and to the pursuit of connections wherever they may lead rather than respecting disciplinary boundaries in theory and method (Sayer 2001). Practices of borrowing, adapting and re-purposing theoretical concepts across disciplinary boundaries are understood as productive and desirable, rather than dangerous or lacking rigour. As I have discussed in chapter one, my stance on postdisciplinarity remains a cautious one that does not posit the postdisciplinarity as a temporal after the fact of disciplines, as I remain unconvinced that the disciplinary structuring of the academic landscape is near implosion. Poststructural critiques of grand narratives and expert knowledges, in concert with feminist, postcolonial and queer challenges to epistemological and methodological orthodoxies testify to an increasing unease with pure disciplines and received paradigms. Critical interventions – queer, feminist or otherwise inclined – are, however, often directed at such disciplinary knowledges, but listened to predominantly by audiences left of their mainstream(s) – either within gender or queer studies as fields of their own, or in rather marginalised queer sub-disciplines. The queer migrations scholarship that I have used as an entry point to queering in this thesis figures as a case in point here. On the one hand, likely due to its attachment to queer bodies and spaces, it remains somewhat contained in a sub-discipline on the margins of migration studies, while the mainstream of the discipline goes on with business as usual without taking considerable note of this work. As long as such criti-

cal scholarships are regarded as sub-disciplines related to disciplinary modes of producing knowledge more generally in terms of what does and does not “belong” to the disciplinary mainstream, the discussion continues to take place within critical enclaves. In a call for a postdisciplinary approach to migration studies, on the other hand, Favell (2008) points to methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003, 2002) as the main disciplinary problem of migration studies – one that has its roots in modernist definitions of migration, of states, and of the international system, and in binary assumptions about migrants and migrations. In framing queering as postdisciplinary practice, and in ascribing postdisciplinarity queering potential, both of these critiques enter into dialogue with one another. After all, a queer intersectional approach hopes to challenge the binary logics that nurture methodological nationalism – and the heteronormative assumptions that often go hand in hand with such research. Queering framed as a postdisciplinary practice, I hope, has the potential of queering disciplinary canons, and the ways in which knowledge on research subjects/objects is produced. By that I mean the potential to drive queer critiques (and by extension feminist and anti-racist critiques) closer to the centre of mainstream knowledge productions. Queering as a postdisciplinary practice thus has the potential to become a point of departure for queer work beyond queer fields, to take queer beyond itself – not just in terms of the work that queering can do, but also in terms of where/how/by whom it gets listened to and taken up. On the one hand, I thus

frame queering as one amongst potentially many postdisciplinary practices. It is as a postdisciplinary practice that I have used queering in its capacity as a methodological move against hetero- and other normativities, and as a corrective in relation to intersectionality. Postdisciplinarity, on the other, might in turn be thought of in terms of its own queering potential in the face of disciplinary canons and thus takes queer beyond its home turf in queer theory and gender studies to drive queer critiques closer to the modes of knowledge production they address. Queering, framed as a postdisciplinary practice, thus not only hopes to intervene in the disciplinary knowledges queer critiques challenge, but equally interrogates the institutionalisation of queer fields of study. What if, for instance, queer field imaginaries (Wiegman 2012) consisted of queering the disciplines, queering disciplinary modes of knowledge production to the extent that queer as a field, or compartmentalised queer sub-disciplines became obsolete? As the example of queer migration scholarship shows, queering cannot be just one thing, nor can I provide a definitive answer to this question. I would, however, tentatively posit that by applying a logic similar to the one this thesis has extended to transnational subjects throughout to queering as a postdisciplinary practice, it might be understood as a becoming, as processual and never quite finished or achieved – but with the potential to *do* something to the disciplinary structure of knowledge productions in the process.

## Queer intersectional futures

As the lessons from the case study and the limitations outlined above make clear, my project cannot claim to live up to all of its own critiques and aspirations. While the dialogue between queering, intersectionality, and transnationalism has been instructive, as has the one between object and subject of study, it is equally instructive that the mechanisms by which the case and its archive were selected tether so closely to the very modes of (intersectional/transnational) analysis that I have critiqued for the ways in which they “stick” too easily to particular subjects and bodies. This final section of the chapter thinks about a few ways in which a queer intersectional approach to transnational becomings may be taken forward to potentially unlearn some of the attachments my instrumental approach to the case study has been afflicted with. By way of conclusion, and contra any sense of definite closure, I want to consider a few possible future directions for queer intersectional research and theorising. Grewal and Kaplan (1994) have explored, by the means of a transnational feminist lens, how a range of key terms and concepts, for instance postmodernity, postcoloniality or the global/local circulate. The “scattered hegemonies” that they arrive at as a result — the multiplicity of transnational and localised circuits of power that knowledge productions, subject formations as well as feminist alliances encounter and are imbued with — are

as pertinent in 2014 as they were two decades ago. I hope to, in turn, further explore how the notions of transnational, intersectional, and queer, in the formulation of a queer intersectional approach to transnational becomings that they have settled into through mutual dialogue in this thesis, circulate through contexts different from the one the case study here has provided, and how they may enter into different dialogues and shift to perhaps settle in different ways. The potential directions for future research in this context are thus as multiple as transnational becomings. The ones I would like to point to here are directed at expanding the conversation this thesis has engendered rather than at treating a queer intersectional approach as a “finished” product to readily be applied elsewhere. Two pointers emerge through the lessons learned from the case study and the discussion of the limitations of this thesis, namely a continuation of the conceptual dialogue that additionally takes on board the dimension of temporality, and a case study that more directly resists the attachments a queer intersectional lens seeks to challenge. My further suggestions for continued dialogue take place on three related registers: different transnational spaces/subjects a queer intersectional approach may be thought through and have currency in, different becomings to theorise queer intersectionally, and different interventions queering as a postdisciplinary practice may make.

Most immediately, a queer intersectional approach to transnational becomings might be extended to other transnational spaces than the one I have worked with/through in part II of the present thesis. By that I not only mean that other transnational becomings marked as Other through their migratory history or ethnic and religious affiliations such as the British Arab transnational space, or the transnational space between former Yugoslavia and Switzerland, to name just two examples, might be approached queer intersectionally. Inspired by Brah who cites England (1996), respectively London/Britain (1999) as examples for her diaspora space, or by Fortier (2003, 2001) who explores queer migrations in relation to moving home with/without crossing borders thus queering the home, old and new, in the process, I also see queer intersectional potential in thinking further about what counts as a transnational space, respectively how fields of application for a queer intersectional approach to transnational becomings are selected. What if, for instance, queer intersectional loosened itself from the double bind this thesis has encountered (see above), on the one hand in detaching itself from transnational bifocality and intersectional reliance on identity categories, while on the other locating the case study in the British Asian geopolitical context, scholarly, and representational space? The lessons and limitations that this chapter has outlined might serve as a starting point for further thinking about how to do so. The conceptualisation of the transnational space chapter two has pursued and aligned my work with – open-ended, multiply inhabited, and decoupled from

the act of migration – might in turn enable further unlearning of transnationality's close ties with nation and ethnicity to extend queer intersectional thinking and research to transnational becomings through social movements like Occupy or Anonymous, or through global cities as transnational spaces. Empirically, different kinds of data might be considered queer intersectionally. While, due to its instrumental nature, the case study this project pursued has focused its analysis on a small range of (equally instrumentally selected) representational sites, much of the scholarship that has informed the dialogue throughout this thesis – for instance on (but not limited to) intersectionality, on transnational and queer migrations, on digital diasporas, and on British Asian spaces – draws on qualitative interview data, on ethnographic data, on larger textual archives, and/or on quantitative data. To, in some ways, lead the dialogue between transnationality, intersectionality, and queer full(er) circle, a larger-scale empirical project might explore how a queer intersectional approach performs in relation to larger data sets, and in relation to interview or ethnographic data. Such a project might on the one hand foster a tighter feedback loop between a queer intersectional lens and some of the literatures it has drawn on in its own becoming. On the other hand, it might encourage further thinking about methodological challenges in managing such data on larger scales without conceding to finite categories of analysis and intersectional check-lists, or re-operationalising the transnational space (and thus returning to a narrower definition) in research practice – questions this thesis

has not been able to explore. In addition, by the means of exploring different kinds of data, and using a range of different methods of analysis, the materiality in the material-discursive entanglements chapter three has explored but the case study in this project has only touched upon in passing (see also above), might be engaged empirically.

Shifting registers slightly, queer intersectionality as an approach to the becoming of subjects might be theorised in relation to becomings other than transnational ones. The kinds of critical engagement part I of this project has been invested in – in short, engagements critical of essentialising subjects, of easy categorisations and (check)lists of differences that matter, and of an intersectionality that tethers disproportionately to particularly marked bodies – suggest, perhaps, that a queer intersectional approach need not remain limited to the particular dialogue around knowledge productions on transnational subjects that this thesis has engaged it in. Whether the direction to take is a fuller queer intersectional theorisation of subject formation in general, or queer intersectional interventions into different disciplinary modes of approaching different becomings in particular shall remain an open question here. Either direction might include building on the paradox this project has encountered in choosing its case based on some of the same assumptions it conceptually counters (see above) to extend further queer intersectional consideration to the mechanisms by which subjects and objects of study become

available to research questions, for instance by drawing on literatures, cases, and examples that resist an all-too easy tether to bodies marked by particular constellations of racialised, gendered or sexualised difference.

Finally, I hope for a potential for queering as a postdisciplinary practice to be extrapolated to theories other than intersectionality, and to fields of study and disciplines other than the ones I have engaged in dialogue in this project. While I cannot begin to provide a semblance of a comprehensive overview here, one example of field that might be fruitfully envisaged through queering as a postdisciplinary practice and/or queer intersectionality emerges from the case study in part II of this thesis. That is, I wonder whether so called virtual spaces beyond the example of *Bhagyawati* in chapter seven, and modes of knowledge production on online becomings in general might benefit from the kind of queering move this thesis has proposed. In particular, I see potential to theorise and research online becomings through a postdisciplinary queering move in order to avoid the problematic reliance on digital dualism (Jurgenson 2012) that artificially divides into on-/offline worlds, which after all is a binarism not dissimilar to the hetero/homo or male/female ones habitually addressed through queer critique, or the here/there one this thesis has attempted to queer.



## **Appendix**

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### **Appendix 1: Film Synopses**

#### *Synopsis of Britz*

*Britz* is a two-part television drama written and directed by Peter Kosminsky and aired on Channel 4 in 2007. The story revolves around the siblings Sohail (Riz Ahmed) and Nasima (Manjinder Virk) Wahid and is set in a post 9/11 climate where draconian anti-terror legislation is employed against UK Muslims. The same tale is told in both parts of the drama, albeit from two different perspectives – one from each of the protagonists. Sohail secretly joins MI5 to help unravel terrorist plots as a desk officer while continuing his law degree at the London School of Economics and Political Science as a cover story. Nasima is a medical student at the University of Leeds, in a relationship with a black British man, and increasingly involved in radical student politics as well as in her University's Islamic student group. While Sohail is proud to be British, Nasima is appalled by British foreign policy as well as the Terrorism act under which a close friend of hers is arrested for buying what the police deems too large a quantity of pepper. Meanwhile Sohail learns the ropes at the Security Service and is increasingly required to gather intelligence on

some of his friends and acquaintances in his home town Bradford who, it is implied, have become radicalised and may be involved in or have information on the very terrorist cell Sohail's unit is hoping to uncover.

Essentially, *Britz* is thus about two young people from the same background ending up on opposite ends of British law and order, while highlighting the potential for bigotry and (in)justice on both sides along the way. When Nasima's parents learn about her relationship, she is sent to Pakistan to be married. While there, she attends a pre-arranged meeting with a representative of a Jihadist training camp, and eventually fakes her own death to go underground and undergo training as a potential suicide bomber. This plot twist reveals that the parents' arguably stereotypical reaction in wanting to marry her off was anticipated by Nasima in her ploy to travel to Pakistan to join the camp. At the end of her training she decides to become a suicide bomber and embark on her final mission to London. Sohail, meanwhile, follows a lead deemed a dead-end by his team at MI5 in solo action. It turns out that his instincts were spot on as his pursuit leads him to a concert held in a public square in the financial district of Canary Wharf, where he finally identifies his sister Nasima who is concealing a bomb on her body. While the cliffhanger at the end of the first episode leaves the outcome open, it is revealed at the end of the second episode that she in fact does pull the trigger, killing herself, Sohail, and presumably all those present on the square in Canary Wharf. The

very last scene of *Britz* then shows a pre-recorded video in which Nasima explains her actions and implicates all British citizens in her actions for their apathy and inaction in the face of severe injustices Muslims are subjected to.

### *Synopsis of Second Generation*

*Second Generation* is a two-part television drama aired on Channel 4 in 2003. It was written by Neil Biswas, directed by Jon Sen, with a soundtrack composed by Asian Underground artist Nitin Sawhney. Set in London's British Asian music and club scene of the time, the plot revolves around a love triangle between the protagonists Heere Sharma (Parminder Nagra), her white British fiancé Jack Woodford (Danny Dyer) and her British Asian childhood sweetheart Sam Khan (Christopher Simpson). Thematically the drama focuses on issues around identity, culture and belonging of second generation British Asian youth. It does so by the means of a number of equally pivotal and enmeshed story lines: the romantic relationships between Heere, Jack, and Sam; the complicated friendship and shared history between Heere's and Sam's families; and the music scene Sam is involved in as the owner of a record label, and Jack participates in as a journalist.

Estranged from her family for nine years, independent minded Heere is living with her fiancé, music journalist Jack. Her older sisters get in touch

with her when her father, the owner of a local curry factory, falls severely ill. Heere is thus forced to confront her past, her hostile family, and her father's seemingly imminent demise, when, to complicate matters, she runs into her first love Sam. Against expectations, just after Heere's sisters had decided to switch off his life supporting machines, their father makes a recovery. As a result, not only does Heere have to confront their complicated family relations, but the fraught relationship between the two patriarchs (Heere's father and Sam's father) also begins to take centre stage. The long histories of their friendship and business partnership, complicated by the romantic exploits of their offspring, primarily Heere and Sam but also the extra-marital affair between Heere's sister and Sam's brother, unravel when faced with past and present intrigue and manipulation. While Heere's father suffers from ill mental health – he is troubled by visions and haunted by the fate of his late wife – Sam's father is driven to suicide by the unfolding events.

Meanwhile, record label Monsoon has recruited young British Asian rapper Uzi and is on the verge of mainstream success by the means of a take over deal by a larger British label. Sam is conflicted over this transaction as he wants to remain independent to promote young (Asian) talent, and fears Monsoon is selling out. Heere oscillates between Sam and Jack, and after much torment admits her love for Sam but leaves both men behind to take care of her father, rescue/kidnap him from the care home the sisters had him

committed to, and leave for India with him. The drama then ends in Kolkata, where Heere has moved with her father to resolve the past, and as is revealed in the final scene, is joined by Sam to finally start over their romantic relationship there.

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