MAPPING INTIMACY
The South Asian Beauty Salon in London and the Production of Diasporic Space

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of:

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Submitted for examination: September 2023

Declaration

I, Nandita Dutta, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Date:_____28 September, 2023_____

Abstract

Through an ethnographic study of two beauty salons in London owned, run and frequented by first-generation migrant women from India, Pakistan, Nepal and Afghanistan, this thesis seeks to examine the semi-private space of a beauty salon as a site in which South Asian migrant women may potentially forge intimacies and solidarities. It situates itself at the intersection of literatures addressing alternative forms of intimacy outside the home and the family, the socio-political value of beauty salons and diasporic placemaking.

This study argues that a collective pursuit of normative femininity through beauty leads to intimacy in the beauty salon. However, when migrant women come together in an all-women's space, shared experiences of gender also lead to a collective articulation of resistance to gender norms. Through 'women's talk' as well as practical acts of support, the South Asian beauty salon emerges as a localised support system for first-generation migrant women who are geographically separated from familial and community support networks. Salon owners, beauticians and clients collectively produce the salon as a home away from home, which is reminiscent of the homeland, thereby producing ethnic intimacy. This thesis shows how 'South Asian' becomes a useful heuristic to capture the nature of this diasporic space.

When we speak of a South Asian diasporic space, however, such a space can hardly be understood as a neutral or secular one. This study argues that diasporic intimacy unfolds along religious lines instead of national boundaries by demonstrating how the two salons are produced as Hindu and Muslim spaces respectively. Finally, this thesis looks at whether the South Asian beauty salon supports or suppresses intimacy with racial others. It argues that by creating a hierarchy of white clients as most desirable and black clients as least desirable, beauticians consolidate the category of South Asians as 'our people', the only ones with whom intimacy is truly possible in the beauty salon. This study, then, illustrates the practices of both intimacy and boundary-making that produce the South Asian beauty salon in London as a diasporic space for women.

Impact Statement

In this statement, I discuss the methodological and policy implications of my research.

My study has used a novel methodological approach to study South Asian migrant women in the UK. Instead of studying a particular community of first-generation migrant women, I conducted an ethnography of two beauty salons run and visited by first-generation migrant women. I found that the ethnography of a bounded space can reveal a lot about migration, migrant labour, translocation practices of placemaking as well as making of boundaries. This approach has been particularly useful in studying the very heterogeneous South Asian diaspora which has rarely been studied as a social group in the UK. By studying the space of the beauty salon, I was able to analyse the relationships between South Asian women and black and white women, as well as the dynamics between South Asian women of different religious and caste affiliations. My study has illustrated how a sustained ethnography of place can contribute to migration scholarship which future researchers can make use of.

The main finding of my study that beauty salons are spaces of diasporic intimacy for first-generation migrant women has major policy implications for local councils and charities trying to reach migrant women who do not speak English. The value of beauty salons demonstrated in my thesis implies that beauty salons can be utilised for dissemination of information to target groups that may be considered hard to reach. The borough where one of the salons I conducted research in is located has a high rate of domestic violence. As I noticed leaflets for domestic violence survivors in several South Asian languages strewn over cafes and pharmacies, I wondered -- why not the beauty salon? I found in my research that a beauty salon is one of the spaces that women can safely access and seek advice in.

With a public-engagement grant from UCL, I designed a series of workshops titled ‘Not Just Beauty: Using Beauty Salons to raise awareness among South Asian Migrant Women’. The aim of these workshops was to equip South Asian beauticians with conceptual knowledge about issues related to gender, gender-based discrimination, gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health so that they can provide appropriate guidance and signposting to their customers. These workshops were attended by the salon owners and the beauticians working in both the salons at that point in

time. It was very well-appreciated by the beauticians who reported feeling more confident in offering advice to customers who often shared their personal problems with them. Similar workshops and information sessions can be valuable avenues for local councils and charities trying to get their message across to communities of migrant women.

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks go to these people:

My supervisors. Ann Varley for being meticulous and demanding while being generous with her trust, care and investment in my research. Katherine Twamley for her encouragement and support at all times.

Christelle Avril, Kareem Khubchandani and Pankhuri Agarwal for showing me what care and solidarity look like in academia.

All friends and well-wishers who expressed enthusiasm and curiosity about the research that kept me going.

Noor and Anita for letting me into their beauty salons and their lives.

Param and Mamta for teaching me the ropes of beauty work.

And Kévin, who read everything I wrote and found it magnifique.

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In memory of

Mamta, a fine beautician and finer beauty teacher gone too soon

In a country where women are easily forgotten...

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1. Beauty salons and diasporic space

I was never much of a beauty salon user in India, where I lived for the first twenty-five years of my life. I would only make a quick, once-in-a-fortnight trip to get my eyebrows shaped, something I had been doing since my teenage years, without giving into the million temptations in the form of beauty services that salons in India offer - but also taking the eyebrow threading service I used regularly for granted. It was only when I first came to the UK in 2015 that I realised that eyebrow threading was not something that all women got done. Neither was it a service that all beauty salons offered. I had to find salons with South Asian-looking beauticians to make sure that eyebrow threading would be on their list of services. The very fact that I could get my eyebrows threaded in England was indicative of the presence of a large South Asian population in the country – South Asian business owners and beauticians, to be precise. When I lived briefly in the south of France, with a negligible South Asian population, I realised that there was no way of getting my eyebrows threaded at all.

Once I had located salons that I thought of as South Asian, the role of ethnicity in such spaces became clear to me. The beauty salon is a site of cultural and identity production as 'beauty' is always mediated by racial, sexual, class and geographical cultures (Candelario, 2000). Beauty practices have a paradoxical element insofar as they may enable a migrant women to perform cosmopolitanism by distancing herself from the ethnic or reify her ethnic identity by engaging with it. Either way, a beauty salon could be seen as an important space vis-à-vis a woman's migrant identity. Given the beauty salon's role as a de facto female space, it has been studied as a space of female bonding (See Furman, 1997; Black, 2004; Scanlon, 2007; Liebelt, 2016). The beauty salon has not, however, been studied specifically in relation to migration. The two commercial sites tied to migrant identity that are usually explored in the literature are ethnic grocery stores (Mankekar, 2002; Wang & Lo, 2007) and ethnic restaurants (Sabar & Posner, 2015; Miranda-Neito & Boccagni, 2020). Ethnic grocery stores and ethnic restaurants are migrant-run establishments that create familiarity, belonging and sociality between co-ethnics through consumption of products and services reminiscent of the homeland. Despite the presence of migrant-run beauty salons and the ethnic nature of beauty services they offer, the beauty salon has not been accorded the same importance as a migrant space of belonging and sociality, or what I call a 'diasporic space'.

When I returned to India after completing a master's degree in Gender Studies in London, I had started to think about a research project that would look at the lives of first-generation South Asian women in the UK. I wanted to adopt a spatial approach in my study by taking an everyday space as a starting point instead of a particular community of migrant women. I was disappointed to find that the home had consistently been privileged as a site of investigation in studies of migrant women from South Asia. I wanted to think of spaces outside the home and the workplace that may be of significance to South Asian women. What came to mind were English classes, community centres and religious sites. What about beauty salons, I asked myself. Could beauty salons be looked at spaces where migrant women meet other migrant women, reminisce about 'home' together and provide support in navigating life in the UK? English classes, community centres and religious sites are meant to facilitate integration and social cohesion in a multicultural society. A beauty salon, on the other hand, is primarily a site of leisure and consumption. It is also, however, something more than that. In her poem 'Among the things that use to be', Willi Coleman alludes to the beauty salon as a place where 'lots more got taken care of than hair', which 'could have been a hell-of-a-place to ferment a revolution'. I was curious to find out how migrant women relate to each other in the beauty salon – what do they talk, joke and complain about? What is the 'lots more' that gets taken care of in salons owned and visited by migrant women? That a beauty salon exceeds its core purpose of providing beauty services signifies the multiplicity of meanings a space can hold as well as women's agency in using spaces creatively.

In a beauty salon, a woman is able to focus on her embodied self and come into close contact with other women's bodies, without the presence of a male gaze. Could a space that is so categorically marked as corporeal and female allow for a conception of migrant women beyond their roles as wives and mothers? Could it be seen as a space of intimacy? Not just from portrayals of beauticians in popular culture but also from personal experience I knew that clients confided their deepest secrets in the beauticians. The intimacy in the beauty salon, especially between the beautician and the client, was both physical and emotional in nature. Therefore, I decided to use the lens of intimacy to study beauty salons. Those researching migrants from the Global South are 'often compelled to only ask particular questions and frame their research within certain limited categories' (Kirmani, 2020: 321). These limited categories and preconceived notions about migrant women from the Global South seldom allow researchers to imagine them as seekers of pleasure, leisure and intimacy.

My research aims to investigate the South Asian beauty salon in London as a diasporic space for first-generation migrant women from South Asia through the lens of intimacy. I am interested in studying first generation South Asian women because political and popular discourses have typically presented them as docile, passive, and traditional with little to no participation in public life or role beyond the household (Brah, 1987; Watson & Ratna, 2011). A majority of first-generation South Asian migrant women (those who were born in countries in South Asia) come to the UK on family visas.[1] At the end of 2021, 46% of non-EU born migrants in the UK were on family visas, with India and Pakistan being the top two countries of origin for these migrants (Migration Observatory, 2022). Many South Asian women also come to the UK as 'dependants' of their husbands who migrate on skilled worker or student visas. In 2022, the top 5 nationalities of those granted dependant visas in the UK were Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (UK government, 2022).

My rationale behind focusing on migrants whose specified reason for migrating to the UK is not to take advantage of an educational or employment opportunity but to join a family member, usually their husband, is that women who are defined by kinship networks are those whose status as agentic and autonomous subjects is most likely to be overlooked by researchers. Therefore, as the starting point for my research, I wanted to find beauty salons in London owned and run by first-generation migrant women from South Asia, with the assumption that these salons would also draw clients from the same background.

I have conducted over two years of ethnographic fieldwork in two such beauty salons in London: Noor's Hair and Beauty, owned by Noor from Pakistan and Anita's Hair & Beauty, owned by Anita from Nepal.[2] The beauticians working in these two salons came from India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the salons by working as an assistant. My work entailed washing clients' hair, making them tea or coffee and cleaning.

My approach towards South Asian women I encountered in beauty salons was one of curiosity because at the time of this research, I did not see myself as a migrant who was in the UK for good. I

1The UK Government defines family visa as a category of visa issued to a person to live with their spouse or partner, fiancé, fiancée or proposed civil partner, child, parent or relative who will provide long-term care for them.

2 Names of salons and persons used are pseudonyms.

believed my stay in the UK to be transient, just for the purpose of my PhD, following which I was to go back to India. Hence, I was curious about those who were invested in the idea of making the UK, specifically London, their home. I was also curious about the beauty salon because it was not a space that meant much to me personally. The prospect of spending hours in beauty salons was for me like stepping into a whole new world. As I started 'hanging out' in beauty salons, even inviting my women friends to join, I found it to be a pretty enjoyable experience. Gradually, I also realised that the thought process of the participants in my research was not very different from mine. Even if they had lived in London for 15-20 years and/or changed their passports to British, they still harboured a desire to return to their countries of origin. They did not see themselves as 'British' or 'British South Asian' but as Indian or Pakistani. This assertion is supported by research with initial cohorts of first generation South Asian migrants in the UK who reported not having a strong sense of British identity (Jaspal, 2015). This is why I use 'South Asian' in my thesis as opposed to 'British South Asian'.

1.2. The diversity and heterogeneity of South Asian migration to the UK

As a sub-region of the Asian continent, South Asia is defined in both geographical and ethno-cultural terms. Geographically, South Asia comprises of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Some definitions also include Afghanistan. As an ethno-cultural category, the usage of 'South Asian' is much more complex and fraught, especially in a diasporic context. That is because ethnicity itself is extremely complex for populations from this part of the Asian continent. For example, a first-generation migrant from Pakistan might name Pakistani as their ethnicity but also Punjabi, an ethnic category that defies national borders. The Nepali diaspora in Britain also provides a good illustration of this complexity. Although mass migration from Nepal to Britain only began in 2004, the Nepali diaspora has built over 400 organisations here (Gellner, 2015). While some of these organisations are religious-based (Hindu, Buddhist, Kirant, Bon and Christian), others are ethnic-based (Gurung/Tamu, Magar, Tamang, Sherpa, Newar, Chhetri, Hakali, Limbu, Rai), or based on the district or cluster of villages in Nepal from which the migrants originate. There are also associations for groups of Gurkha soldiers who were recruited and went through their training at the same time. Thus, migrants find various ways of building communities and finding belonging, all of which may be based on different understandings of shared ethnicity. Very few migrant individuals or communities in the UK would, however, rally around an 'integrating' category of 'South Asian'.

By using 'South Asian' as a descriptive category, then, am I imposing from above a term that would actually make little sense to people themselves? I work with the assumption that ethnicity is always already unstable and ambiguous. Criticising the essentialist concept of ethnicity, Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd (2004: 209) have termed it a 'notoriously slippery concept'. There is nothing about an ethnic community that is ontologically fixed or self-explanatory. The formation of an ethnic community is a relational process contingent upon and situated in a given institutional, socio-cultural and legal context (*ibid.*). Brought into being through social processes, ethnicity often derives its meaning from other categories such as language, historical origin, religion or culture. This is not to say that these other categories become superficial signifiers of ethnicity but that they partially constitute what we understand as ethnicity and its affective dimension.

'South Asian' makes sense for my research because when I started out, I did not know what kind of salons I might be able to access. [I was open to them being owned and staffed by Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Nepali women due to my proficiency in languages spoken in those countries.] Nor did I know whether or not the clientele would bear resemblance to the ownership, or along which axis or axes. Even if one could assume that a Bangladeshi salon would draw mainly Bengali-speaking clients, they could still be from Bangladesh or from India. If a Bangladeshi Muslim owner drew Muslim clients, however, they could be from any country in South Asia. Thus, identifying people along national lines made little sense for my research. There are linguistic and cultural similarities between Punjabis in India and Pakistan or Tamils in India and Sri Lanka. While Islam is followed in almost every South Asian country, Hinduism is a majority religion in India and Nepal. Culturally, certain food items and habits, cinema and music can be said to have a pan-South Asian appeal. Thus, 'South Asian' becomes a useful heuristic device to hold together – initially, at least, for the sake of convenience - migrants who originate in the eponymous geographical region and share ethno-cultural traits.

At the same time, if not used carefully, the term 'South Asian' runs the risk of homogenising people with very different histories, cultures and migration trajectories. In that sense, this thesis can also be read as a constant interrogation of the category of South Asian. Almost every empirical chapter here is undergirded by concerns around what practices reaffirm a sense of *South Asian* identity and which others reveal its artificiality. To be precise, I am concerned with how South Asian identity is articulated or mobilised within the space of the beauty salon in London.

The story of South Asian migration to the UK is mainly presented as the story of migration from the former British colonies in the Indian subcontinent as part of the Commonwealth. The first wave of migration from the Indian subcontinent to Britain in the 1950s is attributed to Britain's post-war economic expansion. The colonies that had once been a source of cheap raw material now became a source of cheap labour, with the migration of South Asian men who took up unskilled jobs in poorly paid sectors of the economy such as textiles, clothing and footwear industries (Brah, 1987, 2006). Early migration to the UK from South Asia took place primarily from the regions of Kashmir, Punjab, Bengal and Gujarat, with certain places in these regions, such as Sylhet in Bengal and Mirpur in Kashmir, contributing the majority of migrants (Ali, 2006). These regions had particular imperial links with Britain, such as men from the region having worked for the British Army or the East India Company (Peach, 2006). In the 1960s and 1970s, another wave of South Asian migrants arrived in the UK from East Africa. Predominantly Gujarati, they came from urban backgrounds and were part of the emerging middle classes in East Africa. Many of them were expelled during the Africanisation campaigns in former British colonies such as Uganda and Kenya while a small number came from existing diasporic communities in countries such as Guyana, Trinidad and Fiji (Peach, 2006). What marked these Gujaratis apart from the general South Asian pattern of migration and settlement was that they came with their families, unlike the male migrants from the Indian subcontinent who came and found work, lived together in shared housing and then gradually brought their families over to the UK (Ramji, 2006).

It was the 1971 Immigration Act that dismantled universal Commonwealth citizenship, a framework of citizenship based on British subjecthood in former colonies of the Indian subcontinent. While post-war Commonwealth immigration to Britain was 'largely spontaneous and always entirely unwanted', racist British governments allowed it to continue until it was beneficial for the labour market (Consterdine, 2017: 2). The 1971 Immigration Act followed from the Immigration Acts of 1962 and 1968 to restrict further settlement of migrants from the Commonwealth in the UK (Consterdine, 2017). As South Asian migration markedly declined in the period after 1971, much of the scholarship on first-generation South Asian migrants in the UK looks at the experiences of cohorts that had arrived before 1971.

South Asian migration to the UK, however, has continued in many different forms and waves. According to the 2021 census, there are 920,000 Indians and 624,000 Pakistanis living in England

and Wales, with India retaining its position as the most common country of birth of migrants in the UK since the last census (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Significant class stratification has also emerged among South Asian groups over the decades. Despite the presence of a professional/entrepreneurial middle class that is able to access elite education for their children, the majority of South Asians are still working class (Brah, 2006).

Owing to their substantial numbers, South Asian migration to the UK is often thought of as migration from the Indian subcontinent. However, post 1971, there have been various waves of migrations from countries such as Sri Lanka and Nepal as well. As Daniel and Thangaraj (1995) suggest, migration from the former British colony of Sri Lanka to the UK took place in three phases. In the first phase a mix of Sinhalese, Tamil and Burgher people from elite backgrounds migrated to Britain after Sri Lanka became independent in 1948. The second phase saw the migration of a large number of middle-class Tamil students who came to England in the 1970s to study as they faced discrimination vis-à-vis Sinhalese students in Sri Lankan universities. They completed their education, found jobs and chose to stay on. The third phase was marked by the migration of Tamil refugees and asylum seekers from lower-class backgrounds following the civil war in Sri Lanka in the 1980s.

Nepal was never directly a British colony. Although Nepali migration to Britain is recent compared to other South Asian migrations, it has followed an interesting pattern. Nepali Gurkha soldiers have a long history of serving in the British Army, starting with the British Indian Army. In April 2009, the British Parliament voted to grant residency to Gurkha veterans who had served a minimum of four years in the British Army. Men who had retired from the army after 1997 had already been given UK residency in 2004. As a result, by 2019, more than 90% of Gurkha veterans had moved to the UK (Pariyar, 2020). As the majority of Nepali migrants in the UK are veteran Gurkhas, the ethnic groups from which Gurkha soldiers were recruited are overrepresented in the Nepali diaspora (Gellner, 2015).

Although most of the discourse, policy and public understanding of migration in Britain has been based on migration from the former British colonies, we now live in a context of 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007). Although Steven Vertovec used this concept to mean the diversity of migrant populations in Britain coming from countries that have no specific historical ties with Britain, it can

also be applied to the South Asian context. There is an impressive diversity among the South Asian population itself, with some communities being better researched than others. Two communities that are little known are the over-80,000 strong Catholic community from Goa and the Gujarati-speaking community from Daman and Diu -- both of which have migrated to the UK as European citizens. Portugal decreed that as citizens of former Portuguese colonies, people from the state of Goa and the union territories of Daman and Diu in contemporary Western India could retain Portuguese nationality if they could prove that they had been born before 19 December 1961 - a right extended to two generations of their descendants. This has resulted in a large number of people from these places migrating to the UK through the acquisition of Portuguese passports in recent decades. In Britain, many of them work in the lower rungs of the economy such as food and electronic processing factories or as cleaners and porters (See Mascarenhas-Keyes, 2011; Bastos & Bastos, 2005).

While academic research is usually conducted with specific communities of migrants, focusing on a particular social space such as the beauty salon allows for the possibility of encountering South Asian women from different communities and with varying migration histories.

1.3. Why the beauty salon

South Asian migration to the UK in the post-Second World War period was highly gendered. Men who were given work permits came without their female relatives with the idea of accumulating enough savings and then returning home (Brah, 1987). On the whole, therefore, South Asian women migrated later than men, with the exception of East African Asians who came as family units. When women migrated to join their husbands who had stayed on in the UK, patriarchal racism was institutionalised through immigration control that constructed South Asian women as 'dependants' (Brah, 1987: 45). This contributed to the disempowerment of these women by placing them in a familial and domestic role rather than a market role in popular perception, rendering invisible their participation in the labour market (Boyd and Grieco, 2003).

Research monographs on first-generation South Asian women mainly focus on ethnographic accounts of kinship systems and household structures, the concept of honour and arranged marriages (Ahmad, 2020). S. Sayyid (2006) argues that the use of tropes such as caste, izzat (honour) and biraderi (kinship networks) to study South Asians originate from Indology, a variant

of Orientalism, which measures South Asian ways of living against normative Western practices such that they appear as aberrations. Such 'ethno-national stereotyping of migration channels' has led to studies that have produced monochromatic accounts of South Asian migrant communities in the UK (Charsley et al., 2012: 862). South Asian women have mostly been discussed in the literature as marriage-related migrants. Such stereotyping not only ignores the complexity of these women's lives but also exaggerates the association of marriage migration with South Asian communities rather than others that also contribute marriage-related migrants to the UK population. Katherine Charsley and colleagues (2012) draw attention to the fact that even though the Philippines has recently overtaken Bangladesh as the third largest national group in marriage-related settlement, academic research on female Filipino migrants focuses on their labour migration for domestic and nursing work. Similarly, even though South Africans constitute the fifth largest group in terms of grants of settlement through marriage, no literature appears to exist on South African marriage-related migration to the UK.

Thus, representations of South Asian women in academic and popular literature are often dominated by discussions of religion, culture and experiences of gender-based violence (Anitha & Gill, 2015). These representations perpetuate the idea of South Asian women as passive, docile, 'limited to (and by) their domesticity, wholly determined by their culture' (Anitha et al., 2012: 755). This runs contrary to the evidence we have of how South Asian women have lived their lives in the UK. They have organised around a range of issues including racist abuse and harassment, deportations and immigration laws and violence against women (Thiara, 2003). 'A surfeit of working-class Asian women heroes' have even led industrial action in factories against poor wages and working conditions, privatisation and casualisation (Gupta, 2005, page unspecified). Some of the notable examples are the Grunswick strike in 1976, Chix bubble gum factory strike in in 1979, the Hillingdon hospital cleaners' stand against privatisation in 1995 and the Gate Gourmet strike in 2005 (Gupta, 2005; McDowell, Anitha & Pearson, 2012).

Outside of their domestic lives, and to some extent their working lives, we know very little about South Asian women in the UK. Given their perception as homebound and traditional, scholars have rarely tried to find out what first generation South Asian women like to do for leisure or fun, for example. In the only two studies that I could find on this topic, Aarti Ratna (2017) looks at how Gujarati women go for walks with their husbands and friends in the evening and use this time to

catch up on news and gossip whilst Kanwal Mand (2006) draws attention to the friendship groups of elderly South Asian women, of different religious and class backgrounds, who meet once a week through events organised by an East London community organisation. The studies that look at South Asian women's networks beyond the family usually tend to focus on second generation and beyond, perpetuating the idea that first generation migrants are traditional and do not engage in social networks outside the home (Mand, 2006).

Given this context, beauty salons become interesting sites of investigation in relation to first generation migrant women from South Asia. The beauty salon acts as a microcosm of society within which wider sociological themes can be investigated (Black, 2002). It is a gender-segregated space tied with notions of femininity. Alongside the construction of gendered identity, it may also aid the construction of migrant identity through consumption of specific products and services and through conversations. It is also a space that presents opportunities for sociality and friendships between migrant women. While being a workplace for the owner and beauticians, it is a site of leisure for clients. Thus, it enables an understanding of South Asian migrant women simultaneously as entrepreneurs and workers as well as leisure-seekers and consumers.

1.4. The lens of intimacy

In conventional understanding, intimacy is associated with domesticity and interiority. The home is seen as the realm of the intimate for intimacy is tangled with ideas of closeness, connection and proximity. Since patriarchal, heteronormative and racist ideologies construct the home as the proper domain of both intimacy and of South Asian women, this thesis looks at how first-generation migrant women may create and experience intimacy outside the familial dwelling. In doing so, it focuses on the all-women's space of a beauty salon instead of spaces conventionally associated with the heterosexual couple and the family. This thesis advances the idea that intimate encounters can be studied in semi-public spaces of transient encounters outside the home. It also recognises that intimacy can be experienced at different scales in different places.

I take intimacy as the starting point in the relationship between the beautician and her client. In the beauty salon, bodies not only come together in a small, confined space but also touch each other. Beauty salons create physical closeness, bringing women into a sensuous immediacy, which,

contrary to popular belief, may not exist even in the spaces where they live and relax. This physical closeness, then, may lead to emotional intimacy.

Conceptualising intimacy in a space of commerce collapses the distinction between intimate relations and economic activities as oppositional and incompatible spheres of life (Zelizer, 2009). In the beauty salon, an intimate relationship is a type of personal relationship that is 'subjectively experienced' and based on 'closeness' that may be emotional, cognitive or physical (Jamieson, 2011: 1). Such a relationship is based on 'particularized knowledge received, and attention provided by, at least one person—knowledge and attention that are not widely available to third parties' (Zelizer, 2009: 14). According to Zelizer, the knowledge involved includes elements such as shared secrets, interpersonal rituals, bodily information and awareness of personal vulnerability. The attention involved includes elements such as terms of endearment, bodily services, private languages, emotional support, and correction of embarrassing defects. Such kinds of intimacy, predicated on commerce, can be found in people's relationships with their carers, massage therapists, personal trainers, hairstylists and beauticians, to name a few.

Moreover, intimacy is defined by the 'frontiers' that protect and enclose it, creating mutually exclusive spheres of intimacy and non-intimacy (Mygdali, 2019: 12). Intimacy raises the question of who is included in it and who is excluded from it. Processes of boundary-making shape how intimacy is experienced and interpreted and that also holds true in the beauty salon. Alongside being a space of homosocial intimacy, a beauty salon also creates boundaries both with the external world and between categories of women within. While intimacy has traditionally been studied as the breaking down of boundaries between two people in a dyad, a spatial approach to intimacy helps us analyse how boundaries are erected and dismantled at different scales. This is something to which I have tried to draw attention in every empirical chapter in this thesis.

I provide a more detailed discussion of intimacy in Chapter 2.

1.5. Research questions and design

The questions that I aim to answer in this study are:

- Can the South Asian beauty salon be understood as a diasporic space, and if so, how and to what extent?

- What role does intimacy play in producing a diasporic space?
- How are the boundaries of a diasporic space drawn? Or, how does intimacy deal with difference?

I do not assume the South Asian beauty salon to be a priori a diasporic space but investigate the practices that potentially make it a diasporic space. I also interrogate the role of intimacy in both creating a diasporic space and drawing its boundaries.

As part of her comparative study of beauty salons in Paris, Cairo and Casablanca, Susan Ossman (2002) developed a taxonomy of beauty salons. She identified three kinds of salons: the neighbourhood beauty salon that acts as a space of female solidarity, the impersonal and hierarchised salon, and the upmarket salon known for famous products, stylists and clients. While Ossman did not elaborate on the neighbourhood beauty salon, that is the kind of salon I set out to find for my study. For the purposes of my study, I define a neighbourhood South Asian salon as a small-to-medium sized salon located in a neighbourhood in suburban London with a sizeable South Asian population. This kind of salon is typically owned by a first-generation migrant from a South Asian country who also serves as the main beautician in the salon. There is no manager or receptionist; rather, the owner takes on these different roles herself. The owner of the salon usually employs one or two beauticians to assist her, who are also first-generation South Asian migrants, and often part-time workers. While a lot of literature has looked at migrant women from the global south performing care work for women from the global north, in South Asian beauty salons, migrant women perform care work for other migrant women.

After gaining access to two such salons in different parts of London, I conducted over two years of ethnographic research including 250 hours of participant observation at Noor's Hair & Beauty and 200 hours at Anita's Hair & Beauty. I also conducted a total of 25 interviews with salon owners, beauty workers and clients at both the salons. Many participants were interviewed more than once during the course of our interaction. The themes that form the bases for the empirical chapters in this thesis have emerged from rigorous and repeated analyses of ethnographic fieldnotes and interview transcripts. London formed an ideal research site for this study as it is a postcolonial, global and multicultural city par excellence (Cox & Narayan, 2008). In such a hyper-diverse city, it is interesting to explore the role of diasporic spaces in shaping people's sense of urban belonging.

The beauty salon has been studied for its value as a women's space. Studying it, in addition, as a diasporic space does two things: a) it highlights the social networks women form in the country of migration outside familial networks, b) it brings in the questions of race, religion, class and caste -- the axes that enable and/or disrupt the building of diasporic communities. Women are also racialised, classed and embedded in other social locations that make them diasporic citizens. Diasporic journeys are lived through the multiple modalities of gender, race, class, religion, language and generation (Brah, 1996). In investigating the beauty salon as a diasporic space, then, I use intersectionality as an 'analytic sensibility' throughout my research (Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013). This means that even when focusing on one social category, i.e., South Asian, it is not possible to understand it fully without analysing the differences as well as commonalities within that category (Dill & Kohlman, 2012). Intersectionality has helped me anticipate that women might experience a diasporic space differently depending on their social location leading to an analysis of how they do so.

As mapping is a way of representing spatial relations, the 'mapping' in the title of my thesis is used as a method of revealing relationships and processes that produce the beauty salon as a diasporic space. As maps are also subjective representations of spatial relations, my use of the word also acknowledges that this ethnographic study is a subjective act of knowledge creation rather than revealing already-existing knowledge.

1.6. Thesis structure and chapter outlines

In Chapter 2, I bring together the two different strands of scholarship that intersect in my work: intimacy and diasporic space. I also explain what contribution I hope to make by using intimacy as a lens through which to study beauty salons as diasporic space. In Chapter 3, I detail how my fieldwork was carried out, including methods, ethical considerations and challenges. I also provide thick ethnographic descriptions of the two salons and their surroundings, setting the ground for the subsequent empirical chapters. Chapters 4-8 in this thesis are empirical chapters discussing the findings of my research.

In Chapter 4, I look at the potential for intimacy that resides in beauty. I argue that in the South Asian beauty salon, seeking beauty is not an individual pursuit but one that is circumscribed by sociality. A collective pursuit of normative femininity through beauty leads to intimacy. It is the sense

of belonging to and sharing in normative femininity that makes the beauty salon a site of female relating. In Chapter 5, I look at how shared experiences of gender, can also lead to a collective articulation of resistance to gender norms, albeit still within the framework of compulsory heterosexuality. Through 'women's talk' as well as practical acts of support, the South Asian beauty salon emerges as a localised support system for first-generation migrant women who are geographically separated from familial and community support networks. Chapter 5 and 6, thus, explore how gender-based intimacy is deployed to both reinforce and challenge normative femininity in the South Asian beauty salon.

In Chapter 6, I look at how salon owners, beauticians and clients, through spatial and symbolic practices, collectively produce the salon as a home away from home, which is reminiscent of the homeland, thereby creating ethnic intimacy. This chapter shows how 'South Asian' becomes a useful heuristic to capture the nature of ethnic intimacy in the beauty salon. When we speak of a South Asian diasporic space, however, such a space can hardly be understood as a neutral or secular one devoid of religious markers. In Chapter 7, I argue that diasporic intimacy unfolds along religious lines instead of national boundaries by demonstrating how the two salons are produced as Hindu and Muslim spaces respectively. As religious intimacy is intolerant of heterogeneity and difference, this thesis also shows how religious belonging creates the category of the Other in the beauty salon.

In Chapter 8, I look at whether the South Asian beauty salon supports or suppresses intimacy with racialised others. I argue that by creating a hierarchy of clients, with white customers labelled 'most desirable' and black clients 'least desirable', beauticians create contingent and situational intimacies. In the beauty salon, intimacy is never straightforward as it is underpinned by commercial considerations.

In Chapter 9, I conclude the thesis by consolidating my arguments about intimacy and boundary-making in the South Asian beauty salon. In addition, I point out the implications of this study, its limitations and directions for future research.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter I provide an overview of the literatures which have informed my research questions and shaped the ways in which I have sought to address them. I begin in section 2.2 with a discussion of current conceptualisations of 'diasporic space'. My aim here is to unpack the characteristics of diasporic space based on existing literature and to demonstrate how and what my study might add to it.

I move in section 2.3 to a detailed consideration of the ways in which intimacy has been used as an analytic lens in the literature to date and, especially, how it has been conceptualised in the public sphere. Specifically, I look at how intimacy has been understood in relation to commerce and migration.

In section 2.4 I explain how I situate my research at the intersection of commercial intimacy and diasporic space, thereby contributing to both the bodies of literatures.

2.2. Diasporic space

Diasporic space is an emergent idea rather than a fully formed concept in geographical literature. This idea, rooted in migrant placemaking practices, has been theorised in many forms – as diaspora space (Jazeel, 2006; Finlay, 2019), home (away) from home (Hondagneu-Sotelo et al., 2021), counter space (Pande, 2018), communal space (Boccagni & Brighenti, 2017) and spaces of belonging (Ehrkamp & Leitner, 2006), to name a few. It is important that I clarify at the outset that beyond the question of nomenclature, what I am interested in is how spaces of migrant belonging have been theorised in the literature. I choose to use the term 'diasporic space' to refer to spaces that signify sociality, leisure and belonging for migrants.[3] Here, diaspora can be understood as migrant 'communities' who 'sustain a national, cultural or religious identity through the sense of internal

3 I use diasporic space instead of diaspora space to distinguish it from Avtar Brah's (1996: 178) conception of 'diaspora space' as 'the intersectionality of diaspora, border and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes'. Brah uses the term to denote a spatiality that is inhabited by not only those who have migrated but also those who have stayed put.

cohesion and sustained ties with a real or imagined homeland' (Adamson & Demetriou, 2007: 13). Not all migrants are inherently diasporic but become so by showing commitment to the diasporic project (Brubaker, 2005; Finlay, 2019). In the case of the South Asian diaspora, this commitment is not so much orientation to roots in a specific place and a desire to return but the desire to recreate a culture in diverse locations (Brubaker, 2005). Diaspora space allows migrants to experience 'some measure of biographical coherence or continuity' (Camposano, 2012: 84).

The concept of diasporic space helps us understand how diaspora and space are mutually constitutive:

> Instead of exploring diasporic processes in a geographic void, and diasporas as separate and bounded entities, diaspora space emphasises that the location of the diaspora, and the interactions between the multiple populations that live there are what construct diasporic identities, belongings, cultures and places (Finlay, 2019: 788)

Diasporic space is not merely a space inhabited by diasporic communities. It is a 'richly textured' space imbued with memory, narrative and desire (Jazeel, 2006: 23). This space invokes real and imagined ties with the homeland (Brah, 1996). A diasporic space holds spatial, temporal and ideological links between migrants and imagined homelands (Jazeel, 2006: 23). The production of diasporic space must not, however, be understood as an attempt to recreate an authentic culture of an idealised homeland but the 'merging of different ways of doing and making, emanating from varied locations' (Finlay, 2019: 798). Authenticity is not what is important about diasporic spaces, nor is it the reason why they attract members of the diaspora. Diasporic space generates affection and attachment by allowing for an imaginative recreation and reformulation of home (Raychaudhuri, 2018). The formation of diasporic space, thus, relies on 'translocal practices' of migrant communities (Brøgger, 2019: 97). Here translocal can be understood as simultaneous situatedness across different locales that characterise the everyday lives of migrants (Brickell & Datta, 2016). What migrants create through the production of diasporic space is not an 'authentic' but a 'simulated' home in a different and contemporary context (Law, 2001: 279). While they draw on familiar identities, symbols and practices of their homeland to form new spaces of belonging and sociability, these elements are simultaneously rooted in the local and in constant negotiation with it. Diasporic communities can, therefore, be understood as cultivating a 'strategic sense of belonging

and inclusion' by utilising the fragments of identity and resources available to them (Jazeel, 2006: 31). .

2.2.1. Representations of Diasporic Space in the Literature

In the literature, diasporic space has been conceptualised on different scales – from monuments and neighbourhoods to rituals and social gatherings. In addition, there is emerging literature on digital diasporic spaces. A diasporic space can be fixed or transient, material or virtual. The differential scales at which migrants produce diasporic space and the forms they take depend on the extent of their rights in their country of migration – the right to be visible as well as to appropriate space (Finlay, 2019). It is also contingent on gendered, classed and racialised identities as well as citizenship status (Pande, 2018). Most examples of diasporic spaces in the literature are predicated on shared religio-ethnic background or the nation-state.

For example, Sri Lankan women who migrated to England with high cultural capital created the Sri Lankan Women's Association in the UK (SLWA) in 1949 to provide a space for wives and daughters of London-based Sri Lankan elite to socialise and help each other in integrating to life in the UK (Jazeel, 2006). The SWLA organises semi-public events that encapsulate their desire to be Sri Lankan within the London-based diaspora. Aside from organising cultural events that create a diasporic space by performing 'Sri Lankan-ness' through cultural practices of food and clothing, the members of SLWA also engage in fund raising to support charities and provide scholarships for girls in Sri Lanka (Jazeel, 2006: 22). Through all their activities, association members maintain their investment in notions of respectability which include abstaining from participating in the political realm or expressing any political opinions. Thus, Jazeel notes that they reproduce the classed and gendered stereotype of Sri Lankan women as custodians of culture and tradition who can engage in cultural and charitable activities but only without engaging with the political.

Diasporic space, at times, can take more concrete and permanent forms. The Bangladeshi diaspora creates diasporic space through the Shahid Minar monument in Altab Ali Park in East London (Alexander, 2013). The marking of an annual ritual every year on February 21 at the site of the monument has become the primary site for the expression of cultural identity for the Bangladeshi community in East London. The original Shahid Minar in Dhaka commemorates the beginning of the Bengali liberation struggle that resulted in the formation of Bangladesh. As a smaller version of

the original monument, the Shahid Minar in East London expresses and reinforces the Bangladeshi diaspora's 'emotional, historic and imaginative link' to their nation (Alexander, 2013: 591). At the same time, the monument also expresses a 'bid for recognition' within the national and multicultural landscape of Britain and a desire for engagement with wider British society (ibid.: 601). In symbolic terms, it demonstrates the embeddedness of the Bangladeshi community in Britain's national political and economic structures. In material terms, the existence of the monument was made possible by a partnership between the local council and the Bangladeshi community. Thus, the Shahid Minar in East London stands as a testimony to 'a recognition of the permanence of their presence, an increased confidence and visibility and contribution to the area, politically, economically, socially and culturally' (Alexander, 2013: 602).

Tamil Hindus in London, on the other hand, affirm their presence by actively creating Tamil diasporic space through religious processions wherein religious deities are paraded in suburban London streets on specific days of the year (David, 2012). The fact that the scale and size of these religious processions are increasing every year is intended to demonstrate the presence of a vibrant and confident Tamil Hindu community in London to a local and global audience. These processions, David argues, are designed to prove group solidarity and cohesion to insiders while demonstrating recognition and visibility to outsiders.

While most diasporic spaces emerge around shared national or ethno-religious identities such as Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi or Tamil Hindu, there is also evidence of 'South Asian' diasporic spaces in the literature. Kanwal Mand (2005) studied the social space created through weekly events organised by an East London community-based organisation for the elderly. These events provided a space for elderly women of varied religious and class backgrounds from South Asia, to come together, socialise and exchange information. They shared snacks, exercised, sang, chatted and attended talks on health and welfare together. While the organisation intended it to be a pan South Asian space, Mand noted how small clusters of women were formed within the larger group based on shared language and attendance at religious institutions.

While actors creating diasporic spaces might intend to show group cohesion, in reality diasporic spaces often reveal internal tensions between communities. As seen above, diasporic spaces are often segregated by gender, class and religion. Even within those homogeneous groups, diasporic spaces

may create exclusion. In creating a space that provides support and comfort to some, it comes to embody a very specific strand of national culture and value (Awan, 2016). Diasporic spaces rely on 'exclusionary sociability' as the social relations within a diasporic space are not accessible to everyone (Brøgger, 2019: 102). This contestation is also embodied by the Shahid Minar discussed before. Rather than being an uncontested site of Bengali diaspora identity, the Shahid Minar is a space of encounter, dialogue and conflict within the British Bangladeshi community (Alexander, 2013). In particular, it is a site of struggle between secular nationalists who are invested in their Bengali identity and Islamists whose Muslim identity takes precedence over their ethnic and national identity. The latter consider a monument to be close to idolatry and hence unislamic. Thus, local and transnational political agendas become intertwined in the struggle over this monument that is supposed to symbolise Bengali diaspora identity.

2.2.2. Beyond the Public and the Private

Feminist geographers have taken one of the two approaches to space: they have either challenged the gendered nature of public and private spaces (acknowledging that the public/private dichotomy remains important in shaping gender relations) or they have rejected the dichotomy altogether, unsettling its discursive legitimacy (Hubbard, 2005; Armstrong & Squires, 2002). Diasporic space might provide us with an alternative to the conception of space as either public or private, whilst at the same time acknowledging the usefulness of this binary in shaping our understanding of everyday spaces. This is especially important in trying to understand what kinds of diasporic spaces migrant women produce or have access to.

Several scholars have taken the worker identities of women who are migrant domestic workers as a starting point to explore what kinds of diasporic spaces they create. As workers whose site of work is the 'home', albeit not their own, staking claim to churches and streets enables them to navigate their lives outside of work. Being out in the city also gives them the freedom to be themselves (Pande, 2018). Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong transform Central Hong Kong into a 'Little Manila' every Sunday (Law, 2001: 265). Thousands of Filipina domestic workers gather in Central Hong Kong to eat Filipino food, read Filipino newspapers and consume products from a host of Filipino speciality shops. Lisa Law (2001) argues that these women transgress local ideas of respectability by getting manicures or haircuts on the pavements or having group photographs taken on the street.

This is an opportunity for them to recover from the 'sensory reculturation' that happens to them in the homes of their Chinese employers, and in so doing, they create 'new ways of engaging with city life' (Law, 2001: 266). These congregations in Central Hong Kong are geared towards generating pleasure and leisure in the company of co-ethnics while being out in the city.

Filipina domestic workers in Beirut, on the other hand, spend their Sundays in cyber cafés and ethnic churches (Pande, 2018). In cyber cafés, they not only explore virtual relationships through internet dating but also establish 'real and intimate contact' with other migrant workers (Pande, 2018: 799). In the church, women go dressed in their Sunday best but not just for religious reasons. They socialise with other migrant workers from their own country, get their hair braided, share gossip and food, and meet male migrant workers for romantic purposes.

Thus, churches, internet cafes and streets are transformed into diasporic spaces, nudging us away from the public/private binary. The appropriation of diasporic space depends on where migrants live and work but also on accessibility and subsequent risks. What is common in the accounts of migrant domestic workers reclaiming space for sociality and leisure is the constant negotiation they must make with the host society in order to carve out these spaces. In the case of Lebanon, the spaces that migrant women use are strategically 'liminal', sitting between visibility and invisibility (Pande, 2018: 791). It is permissible for migrant women to occupy and transform these spaces as they can easily be monitored by their employers whilst at the same time not being desirable spaces for the employers themselves. On the other hand, the transformation of public space in Central Hong Kong creates tensions between Filipina workers wanting to experience leisure and other Hong Kong residents who would prefer that they do so in less conspicuous places. This has led to several state and business interventions discouraging the physical presence of workers in Central Hong Kong as well as increased policing in these areas. The tussle reveals the ways in which intersections of class with race and gender shape how diasporic spaces are viewed and received by the majority populations. Working-class migrant women enjoying themselves in public spaces generates anxiety.

Whether it is created by migrant domestic workers or by elite women, diasporic space reflects migrant agency (Awan, 2016; Finlay, 2019). The right to form a diasporic space is 'the right to produce new socio-spatial patterns and the right to visibly present a collective identity' (Finlay, 2019: 792). Thus, migrants need to attain certain rights to the city in the first place in order to be able to

produce a diasporic space. By expressing their right to space, migrants find ingenious and creative ways to encounter the spatial limitations they face in cities they have migrated to. By producing 'Little Morocco' in Granada in Spain (Finlay, 2019) or 'Little Manila' in Hong Kong (Law, 2001), migrants stake a claim to the city by establishing diasporic spaces. Law (2001: 266) terms little Manila a 'site of resistance' because it disrupts the hegemonic space of Central Hong Kong and draws attention to the tensions of multiculture in the city. Amrita Pande (2018: 781) calls the cyber café and the church 'counter-spaces' as migrant workers assign to them meanings different from those assigned by the dominant social order. By doing so, they use them strategically to challenge exclusion by the state and their employers. Diasporic space also always exceeds its conventional utility. When migrants use pavements to get haircuts or manicures and churches to share food and form romantic liaisons, they are not only displaying agency and creativity but also disrupting the categorisation of spaces as public or private.

2.2.3. Role of Intimacy in Diasporic Space

Diasporic spaces thrive on a sense of connection, of a shared past, of intimacy. In documenting a digital Italian diasporic space in London, Sara Morino (2015: 2) terms it a 'community of comfort, which is real in its emotional and "political" consequences'. Diasporic space produces forms of support and solidarity that are especially significant for new migrants. They not only provide assistance with everyday life such as opening a bank account and finding jobs but also help migrants identify themselves as members of a group of similar people (Morino, 2015). This sense of community helps newcomers cope with loneliness as they feel free to express their values, beliefs and culture in the presence of others like them in the safety of a diasporic space. Diasporic spaces are, thus, characterised by a 'high degree of intimacy' (Morino, 2015: 5).

Migrants sharing food and memories, through shared language and culture, are acts of intimacy that are often performed in spaces commonly understood as public or semi-public. Analysing how forms of intimacy are integral to establishing diasporic space also helps us decouple intimacy from the private realm of the family and the household. Intimacy and/in diasporic space both urge us to create a new grammar of space making that transcends the limitations posed by public/private. At the same time, to move away from the idea of diasporic spaces being welcoming to everyone and devoid of conflict, one must also analyse the boundaries of such an intimacy. Symbolic boundaries are used by

social groups to differentiate themselves from each other and to lay claim to superior status vis-à-vis others. Helping people adapt to their environment through cognitive categorisation and stereotyping, symbolic boundaries are 'conceptual distinctions' that divide people into groups and generate a feeling of group membership (Lamont & Molnar, 2002: 168).

2.2.4. Beauty Salon as a Diasporic Space?

To sum up the characteristics of diasporic space based on the literature: a diasporic space creates belonging not through an authentic recreation of the culture of the homeland but through the strategic use of what is available in the country of migration. Diasporic spaces are sites of migrant leisure, sociality and consumption that reflect migrant agency. They, however, also reveal inner contestation is the diaspora. Thus, they are spaces of both intimacy and boundary making.

Given this backdrop, can the beauty salon be understood as a diasporic space? What does existing literature have to say in this regard?

While the literature shows that all salons are ethnically homogeneous to varying degrees, it is scholars who have studied the 'ethnic salon' that look at race or ethnicity as an organising principle for beauty salons (Rezende, Mafra & Pereira, 2018). In the ethnic salon, race or ethnicity becomes the basis for community building as the salon owner draws clients belonging to the same ethnic and/or migrant background as her. Black beauty salons in the US were archetypal ethnic salons, acting as safe spaces for black women at the height of racial discrimination. Much of the existing literature on ethnic beauty salons looks at black beauty and hairdressing salons. Willett (2000) observes that during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, beauty shops owned by African-American women were used to organise black women politically. This was because civil rights activists found beauty shops to be safer and less visible than African American churches for holding meetings.

Black beauty salons are also sites of cultural and identity production (Candelario, 2020). Here, women are allowed to construct alternatives to dominant white beauty standards and reaffirm Afro beauty. In the context of black beauty salons in the UK, Johanna M. Lukate (2022: 110) calls them 'sites of knowledge production in shaping racial identity constructions'. Based on her ethnographic research, she finds that in such salons black girls are introduced to the meanings and expressions of black femininity from a very young age through practices of styling black hair. She observes that

conversations about race, identity, and even racism are always present in the salon as hair mediates how black women negotiate their identity as well as their environment (Lukate, 2022). Writing about Dominican beauty salons in New York City, on the other hand, Ginetta E. B. Candelario (2020) describes the preference among Dominican women for straight and smooth hair while considering Afro hair to be 'bad'. In recognising that beauty regimes may not always be empowering, Candelario draws our attention to the community that is nonetheless built around beauty practices, demonstrating the 'paradox of Dominican women's beauty culture' (2020: 36). In her words, 'small revolutions ferment in the beauty shop daily when Dominican women confront oppressive conditions generated by government offices, hospitals, schools, employers, husbands, and lovers, with the support and assistance of their beauty shop community and kins' (Candelario, 2020: 47).

Ethnic salons meant for other migrant communities in the US have also been recognised for their value in community building, even though such studies are few and far between. Researching an ethnic beauty salon in South Austin owned by a migrant woman from Mexico, Vivian Deidre Rodríguez Rocha (2018) theorises it as a 'transnational Latin American space' that plays an important role in the lives of Spanish-speaking migrant women. Clients as well as beauticians use the salon to form social networks by sharing job opportunities, offer home-based catering services or sell other products relevant to the community. In addition, they also share tips on migrant life in the US including how to cope with the anti-immigration climate. Thus, even though beauty salons have not explicitly been studied as diasporic spaces, their role in diasporic community formation has been acknowledged.

In this study, I will show how the beauty salon is produced as a diasporic space through simultaneous practices of intimacy and boundary-making.

2.3. Intimacy

The notion of intimacy captures 'deeply felt orientations and entrenched practices that make up what people consider to be their "personal" or "private" lives and their interior selves' (Wilson, 2012: 32). The notions generally understood as being associated with intimacy are privacy, familiarity, sexuality, love and person connection (Hofmann & Moreno, 2016). This close connection with someone can be at a physical, emotional or cognitive level. Understood as an interpersonal state of closeness guided by self-disclosure and responsiveness, intimacy has largely been studied in

romantic or sexual couples and friends. For example, in the *Handbook of Closeness and Intimacy* (Mashek & Aron, 2004), all the works included look at intimacy in friendships and couple relationships. There is a 'taken-for-granted nature' of intimacy studies, whereby it is assumed to always be located in 'the private' and 'the small-scale' (Besnier, 2015: 106). This is also because the study of intimacy is largely conducted within the purview of sociology of family and gender. Consequently, intimate practices have also largely been investigated within the context of the home. Some of the intimate practices that have drawn the attention of researchers are eating, sleeping, gift giving and care or grooming practices in the home (Valtonen & Elina Närvänen, 2016). Sasha Roseneil and Shelley Budgeon (2004: 135), however, assert that if we are to understand the future of intimacy, then sociologists must 'decentre the "family" and the heterosexual couple in our intellectual imaginaries'.

Two scholars who have challenged conventional thinking on intimacy as well as influencing my thoughts on it are Lynn Jamieson and Laurent Berlant. Drawing on David Morgan's (2011) concept of 'family practices' where context-specific practices of 'doing' a family are preferred over any pre-existing ontological idea of a family, Lynn Jamieson (2011: 1) defines 'practices of intimacy' as those which 'enable, generate and sustain a subjective sense of closeness and being attuned and special to each other'. Intimacy understood in this manner is predicated on the performance of certain kinds of action instead of being essentially attached to social units such as the couple or the family.

Similarly, Lauren Berlant (1998: 284) regards intimacy as arising from 'mobile processes of attachment'. She understands it as a process rather than being innately tied to spaces such as the home when writing:

> While the fantasies associated with intimacy usually end up occupying the space of convention, in practice the drive toward it is a kind of wild thing that is not necessarily organized that way, or any way. It can be portable, unattached to a concrete space: a drive that creates spaces around it through practices (Berlant, 1998: 284).

As both 'mobile processes of attachment' and 'practices of intimacy' are detached from the home, they pose a challenge to the spatial location of intimacy. By decentring the family, they locate intimacy outside the domestic realm in practices and processes that can occur even between strangers. Even though such practices may be 'unattached to a concrete space', intimacy is a spatial

process that carves a space for and around itself. For instance, practices of intimacy can be found in a spa, in a hospice, in a pub or at a bus stop. Berlant urges us to think about the attachments between people that take place outside of the domestic sphere – between believers in a church, sports fans or people who walk their dogs at the same time. These kinds of small intimacies are produced relationally. Berlant's (2011) idea of 'intimate publics' is predicated on strangers formed into communities by affective ties. She claims that modern capitalism and consumerist culture have made collective intimacy a public and social ideal by creating new institutions of intimacy such as the cinema (Linke, 2011). These sites of collective intimacy, according to Berlant, can also shape political allegiance and belonging.

Reframing intimacy should also call into question the existing discourse on the binary of the public and the private. According to Berlant, the taken-for-granted public/private dualism also enables and works as a justification for other dualisms such as male and female, work and family, friend and lover, hetero and homo etc. What makes these taxonomic associations seem like facts is that they operate by making the world intelligible. Berlant (1998) argues that it is by dissociating intimacy from taken-for-granted binaries that institutions not usually associated with feeling can be read as institutions of intimacy.

The presupposition that intimacy belongs to the private sphere would imply that intimacy has no relevance to the discussion of large-scale concepts such as the capitalist economy or mass migration. In the subsequent sections, I will draw on the literature to show how intimacy is enmeshed with both commerce and migration.

2.3.1. Commercial intimacy

In hegemonic Western understandings, the intimate and the economic are posited as distinct realms (Ilouz, 2007). What sets the values of family, romance and friendship apart is its separation from the market and its logic, in that the intimate realm is presumed to be non-economic. The private nuclear family appears to buffer individuals who work in the marketplace from its cold logic of instrumentality and non-intimacy by providing intimacy and affection (Wilson, 2012). According to this worldview, intimacy is shared between persons of the family out of altruistic motives, as a form of gift exchange but never as a commodity (Hofmann & Moreno, 2016).

Although maintaining intimate relations and conducting economic activities are viewed as being incompatible and oppositional to each other, the two are almost always enmeshed together in complementary ways. Intimacy is now a part of labour practices while intimate relations rely on the market economy for their sustenance.

2.3.1.1. Maintaining intimate relations through consumption

In *Consuming the Romantic Utopia*, Eva Illouz (1997) argues that romantic feelings are produced and sustained through consumption to such an extent that they have become indistinguishable from each other. For example, going for a movie or to a restaurant symbolises romance so much so that the feeling of romance and the act of consumerism become fused together. According to Ilouz (2007: 5), emotions are integral to consumerism, in what she calls as 'emotional capitalism': 'a culture in which emotional and economic discourses and practices mutually shape each other', thereby producing affect as an 'essential aspect of economic behaviour'.

This is especially true when it comes to the consumption of non-material or intangible goods, otherwise known as 'experiences', which in turn produce 'emotions' (Ilouz, 2009: 387). Culture, leisure and tourism industries, in particular, sell experiential goods wherein the value of the good lies in the emotion generated by the experience of consuming it.

Thus, capitalism in the modern age, according to Ilouz, collapses the distinction between the private sphere suffused with emotions and the public sphere that is supposed to be the realm of rationality.

2.3.1.2. Maintaining intimate relations through paying someone to provide care and labour

Intimate relations based on commercial transactions also step into the domestic realm to compensate for the transformation of the intimate sphere caused by factors such as women's greater participation in the labour force, declining birth rates and aging populations (Yeoh et al., 2023). In a globalised world, women and men in the global north pursue financial gains and individual aspirations at the cost of love and care that they buy from women from the global south who work as 'nannies, maids and sex workers in the new economy' (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003). There is a growing literature on domestic workers, caregivers and sex workers in a transnational context (see Constable 2009 for a summary). The commercialisation of intimacy has expanded to include a

range of new sectors such as international marriage brokers, internet pornography, overseas call centres, adoption agencies and private surrogacy clinics (Parreñas, Thai & Silvey, 2016). This points towards the political economy of intimacy. Nicole Constable (2009: 50) has called this the 'commodification of intimacy' which refers to the ways in which intimacy that was earlier tied to domestic units can be understood to have entered the market to be bought, sold and consumed.

The commodification of intimacy is made possible through the performance of intimate labour. Eileen Boris and Rhacel Parreñas (2010) have defined intimate labour as the work of forging, sustaining, nurturing, maintaining, and managing interpersonal ties, as well as the work of tending to the sexual, bodily, health, hygiene, and other care needs of individuals. Intimate industries rely on producing or modifying emotional experiences in other people (Parreñas et al., 2016). It is aimed at not just producing a specific result but also invoking a specific feeling in the consumer, which can be the feeling of intimacy. An understanding of intimate labour as comprising both material and non-material aspects ties it to Eva Ilouz's (2007: 5) notion of 'emotional capitalism' discussed earlier, wherein the value of the commodity lies in the emotion produced through its consumption. In the context of beauty salons, for instance, clients not only come to get their eyebrows or hair done but also to feel relaxed and pampered. The work of an intimate labourer, then, is not just to provide the necessary service to the customer but also to work with them on co-producing the accompanying emotion.

Scholars have disrupted the notion that intimacy generated as a product of intimate labour is lacking in warmth or authenticity. In her study of white, middle-class escorts in San Francisco, Elizabeth Bernstein (2007: 7) came up with the framework of 'bounded authenticity' explaining how in their interactions with sex workers, male clients look for authenticity, warmth and reciprocity, delineated by commercial transactions, as opposed to the supposedly unbounded romantic engagement of the private sphere. This concept is useful in highlighting that intimate interactions predicated on payment are not necessarily devoid of expectations of intimacy. Thus, instead of bemoaning 'the demise of authentic relations outside the realm of capital', Constable (2009: 58) contends that future research on commercial intimacy must attend to:

> the multiple, complex, transnational, and also transgressive and transformative ways in which emotional ties and relationships are understood, formulated, or prohibited within and beyond local and global spaces.

Intimate labour leads to a reorganization of intimacy such that it is not useful to think of spaces in binaries of local and global or private and public. For example, Julia Twigg's (1999, 2000) work on bathing sheds light on how intimate labour transforms the act of bathing or washing up that is conventionally thought of as an intimate activity performed in the private space of the home. Care workers, mainly migrants, enter the home of their clients -- elderly or disabled people -- and assist them with bathing, restructuring the privacy and intimacy associated with the home and the bathroom. Aside from its spatial connotations, the act of assisted bathing transgresses social rules of privacy and touch. Intimate labourers may also provide services in their homes. Sandya Hewamanne (2012: 323) writes about middle-class Indian migrant women who provide eyebrow threading as a 'home business'. While these women strategically use the public/private dichotomy to claim more respectability for themselves compared to licensed beauticians who work in public places such as malls, in effect, the act of receiving clients in their home disrupts the separation between the two spheres. In order to develop close relationships with their American clients, Indian eyebrow threaders offer them sweets and tea, even meals. Hewamanne notes that this blurs the boundaries between a friend, a customer and a guest. Thus, the framework of private/public is complicated by examples such as care workers assisting with bath in the client's home or an eyebrow threader providing services at her own residence. Commercial intimacy muddles the private/public distinction and creates a new kind of space that lies outside the binary.

2.3.2. Intimate labour and migrant women workers

Much of the literature on intimate labour deals with migrant women, as women and migrants are overrepresented in the category of intimate labourers (Choo, 2017). Intimate labour reflects the hierarchies of race, gender and ethnicity (Boris & Parreñas, 2010). Examining intimate industries lets us see how the global political economy is shaped by cultural logics of race and gender (Parreñas *et al.*, 2016). In relation to labour produced from/by the global south and consumed in/by the global north, racial and gendered logics determine which bodies are expected to provide intimacy and which other bodies are considered legitimate consumers of intimate labour (*ibid.*).

In her work on domestic labour in the UK, for example, Bridget Anderson (2000, 2007) has highlighted how paying a foreign migrant worker, who is expected to perform both physical and emotional labour of care, enables households to perpetuate the idea of other races or social groups as doers of work that they themselves are too important to do. Employers that are part of Anderson's research even articulated that the perceived 'difference' is what drew them to workers from other countries/ethnicities because this difference is construed as lower status (Anderson, 2007: 252).

In beauty work, racial and gendered logics are evidenced by Vietnamese and Korean migrant women dominating the manicure market because of the racialised belief that they are 'naturally' skilled with their hands. The perception of women from the global south, and specifically from Asia, as being innately good and efficient with their hands was initially mobilised to justify their poorly remunerated work in factories producing clothing for export to the west. For instance, a brochure meant to attract foreign firms to Malaysia, discussed by Ruth Elson and Cecile Pearson (1981: 93) claimed that:

> The manual dexterity of the oriental female is famous the world over. Her hands are small and she works fast with extreme care. Who, therefore, could be better qualified by nature and inheritance to contribute to the efficiency of a bench-assembly production line than the oriental girl.

East Asian women were considered not only to have 'nimble fingers' but also to be naturally more docile, hardworking and disciplined and thereby suited to strenuous and monotonous work (Elson & Pearson, 1981: 93). In a striking parallel, Julie Willett (2005) suggests that the nail salons run by Vietnamese and Korean women in the US resemble assembly lines rather than neighbourhood beauty shops. Asian manicurists remain undifferentiated to their non-Asian clients who refer to them as Asians or 'Orientals' instead of the specific ethnic or national group to which they belong (Kang 2003: 824). Miliann Kang's study of manicure work in the US also highlights worker-client relationships in the space of the nail bar, identifying the social hierarchies that result from and/or give rise to commercial intimate interactions that 'occur between women who usually would not find themselves in the same social circles, let alone touching each other' (Kang, 2010: 2).

Literature has started to emerge on how South Asian women are similarly racialised in the beauty industry. Writing about 'ethnic beauty markets' in Los Angeles, Hareem Khan (2022: 42) describes

the marketing of eyebrow threading as a uniquely Indian aesthetic practice in the West. She uses the theoretical framework of 'racialised authenticity' to explain how the 'perceived otherness' of South Asian workers is turned into a form of cultural and economic capital (Khan, 2022: 43-44). The migrant-run threading industry reveals the desire for workers who look and act in a way that authenticates their labour. Workers also strategically mobilise this desire to produce themselves as authentic experts. The eyebrow threaders discussed in Hewamanne's (2015) article, for example, employ certain practices that turn the experience of eyebrow threading into a cultural experience for their American clients. These include sharing recipes and traditional gifts and initiating conversations on yoga, ayurveda and spirituality.

Thus, the beauty industry is an example of an intimate industry that relies on racial and gendered logics wherein certain migrant communities from the global south are produced as ideal intimate labourers in the global north.

2.3.3. Intimacy and boundary work: how intimate workers create boundaries

The successful performance of intimate labour depends on the worker's ability to 'constantly manage the paradox of intimacy and distance' (Yeoh *et al.*, 2023). Intimate workers exercise agency in deciding the degree and forms of intimacy they would provide a particular category of clients depending on their racial, religious or class background. This leads to practices of boundary making that may exclude some clients from certain forms of intimacy. As this intimacy is primarily commercial, it is also determined by the nature of the commercial transaction involved.

In her study of Korean immigrant women-owned nail salons in New York, Miliann Kang (2003) identifies three kinds of intimate labour performed by Korean manicurists depending on the racial and socio-economic backgrounds of their clients. When serving white, middle-class customers, manicurists emphasise physical pampering and emotional attentiveness. In salons frequented by Caribbean and African American women from working-class backgrounds, manicurists provide less emotional labour but focus their efforts on offering original and creative nail designs that their clients value while communicating a sense of respect and fairness. In salons that serve lower and middle-class women of mixed races, manicurists focus on being efficient, competent and courteous without putting in much emotional labour. These practices of boundary making play out at the intersection of clients' expectations as well as the stereotypical beliefs held by workers about different

client groups. In Hewamanne's (2012: 332) work on Indian middle-class eyebrow threaders in the US, for example, the women showed 'a special aversion towards African American clients' who were seen as loud and disrespectful in contrast to white Americans who were believed to be kind.

2.3.4. Beauty Salon as an Intimate Space

As part of her comparative study of beauty salons in Paris, Cairo and Casablanca, Susan Ossman (2002) developed a taxonomy of beauty salons: the neighbourhood beauty salon that acts as a space of female solidarity, the impersonal and hierarchised salon, and the upmarket salon which is known for famous products, stylists and clients (Ossman, 2012). While the upmarket salon focuses on professionalism, privacy and exclusivity, the neighbourhood salon focuses on building intimacy (Liebelt, 2016). While upmarket salons have fancy shopfronts, receptionists, readily available green tea or soda and a concierge-like service, neighbourhood beauty salons rely on establishing affective ties with customers and providing them with a sense of community (Verma, 2023).

Most studies of beauty salons focus on the neighbourhood beauty salon, even if they do not say so explicitly. These studies show that the neighbourhood beauty salon holds the potential to be an intimate space.

Paula Black (2002, 2004) can be credited with positioning beauty salons in the UK as spaces that can be considered worthy of academic attention. She argues that the spaces that had earlier drawn the interest of academics were 'social spaces and intimate worlds open to men' (2004:5). In comparison, spaces such as the beauty salon and the hairdressing salon had received much less attention. Beauty salons occupy the same place in women's lives as gender-segregated public baths or hamams once did as sites of intimacy and sociability through collective rituals of washing, grooming and bathing (Liebelt, 2016). There is a certain parallel, in terms of sociability, between the beauty salon and the tavern or the coffeehouse for men (*ibid.*).

The beauty salon is not only a site of women's social, economic and cultural participation but also a key site of gendered identity formation (Scanlon, 2007). In studies conducted with different communities and cultures, the beauty salon emerges as a site of female camaraderie and solidarity. It is a space where women go to be with each other and to say what they think about men (Scanlon, 2007). Writing about black beauty shops in the US, Julie Willet (2000: 3) terms them places where

'women cherish female companionship, exchange information, share secrets, and either temporarily escape or collectively confront their problems and heartaches'.

Researching beauty salons in Istanbul, Claudia Liebelt (2016) theorises intimacy in the salon as physical and emotional closeness that comes out of everyday practice rather than kinship relations. In the neighbourhood salon, the intimacy that the salon owner tries to create, that is valued by her employees and clients alike, is linked to 'female caring and sharing' that includes sharing of tea, food and cigarettes (Liebelt, 2016: 197).

Alongside gender intimacy, there is also a suggestion of ethnic intimacy in beauty salons, or rather, the intimacy between women in the beauty salon can be read as intimacy between women of the same ethnicity. Black observed that beauty salons in the UK are homogeneous spaces in terms of the ethnic background of their clients. Local salons can be divided into those catering to white women, African-Caribbean women and South Asian women (Black, 2004). Other works too have established the ethnic homogeneity of beauty salons' clientele. For example, Frida Furman's (1997) investigation of how older, middle class Jewish women experience aging through an ethnographic study of a beauty salon in Chicago. Furman's research shows the ways in which the beauty salon becomes a productive site to understand how older Jewish women create friendships and a community of care.

Literature shows sharing of personal information by clients to be an intimate practice in the beauty salon. Beauticians studied by Ursula Sharma and Paula Black (2001) in the UK and Debra Gimlin (1996) in the US claim that offering informal counselling is an important part of their job. Although customers come in seeking specific beauty treatments, they desire to be listened to when they talk about their relationships and other personal issues. Therefore, making people feel better is considered to be an integral part of beauticians' work and a source of considerable job satisfaction (Sharma & Black, 2001). Similarly, hair stylists try to create a personal relationship with their clients by 'listening to and remembering the intimate details of their lives, and claiming emotional attachment to them' (Gimlin, 1996: 514). This kind of emotional work done by beauticians and hairstylists is not extra-economic but deeply rooted in capitalist market relations and structures of employment. For example, self-employed owner-stylists are more likely to invest in emotional labour to retain clients than hourly-paid stylists (Cohen, 2010).

There is something about the physicality of the salon encounter that makes clients likely to disclose sensitive information (McCann & Myers, 2023). Hair and beauty workers come into contact with different parts of clients' bodies depending on the services offered – including intimate areas such as heads, faces, hands, inner thighs. These are sensitive parts of the body that are rarely touched by anyone other than intimate partners, yet which can legitimately be touched in the space of the salon. Drawing links between physical and emotional intimacy, hairdressers acknowledge that it is the physical intimacy of the salon setting and of particular acts such as hair washing that facilitate emotional intimacy with clients (McCann & Myers, 2023).

The intimate nature of the beauty salon makes it a space that is used for purposes other than beauty. Beauty salons have also been recognised for their potential to act as unconventional venues serving to convey important messages, for example, about heath care, to certain populations that are deemed hard to reach by the state and healthcare organisations. This potential arises because beauty salons are spaces which are frequently visited by women and which accommodate lengthy visits involving, amongst other things discussions of topics relating, directly or indirectly, to health (Linnan & Ferguson, 2007). According to Linnan & Ferguson, the loyalty, trust and support women share with their beautician, and the comfort they may derive from the interaction, also play a crucial role. Therefore, from educational campaigns on cardiovascular-disease prevention to breast cancer screening, beauty salons have been used as vehicles to deliver messages around health (Lee *et al.*, 2015; Linnan & Ferguson, 2007; Forte, 1995).

Training programmes have also been launched in many parts of the world to train beauticians and hairdressers to respond to reports of intimate partner violence from clients. In Melbourne, for instance, the HaiR-3Rs (Recognise, Respond and Refer) programme is premised on the understanding that as the salon worker-client relationship is one of trust and intimacy, salon workers can act as community resource to help people dealing with family violence (McCann & Myers, 2023).

2.4. Situating my research: the potential for a new grammar of spacemaking at the intersection of commercial intimacy and diasporic space

As seen in the literature on diasporic space, sociality and belonging within the diaspora is contingent on practices of intimacy. These practices of intimacy are coterminous with practices of boundary-

making, both with other groups in the country of migration to delineate membership and belonging but also within the diasporic group in order to represent a homogeneous national culture. Thus, intimacy can be a productive lens to study diasporic space. The analytic lens of intimacy also enables an investigation of who is included within its folds and who is excluded from it and on what grounds.

Commerce can be one of the starting points for building such an intimacy. The literature on diasporic space suggests that they may also act as sites of commerce. When people gather with the intention of reliving ties to their homeland, they engage in conspicuous consumption of products and services reminiscent of the homeland, generating economic opportunities for some of their fellow migrants. In her description of 'Little Manila', Law mentions Filipino women who trade Filipino pesos for Hong Kong dollars and others who sell Filipino food to fellow migrant women. The ethnic spice/grocery shop is another example of how a diasporic space is often characterised by consumption (Mankekar, 2010; Vogt-William, 2009). Indian grocery stores in California enable migrant belonging by producing a sense of familiarity and nostalgia through the ways in which they display and sell things (Mankekar, 2002). They also provide spaces where Indians meet other Indians and share recipes and information about community events, religious rituals or employment opportunities (*ibid.*). The Indian spice shop is a 'gendered contact zone' wherein female migrants run establishments that provide for the 'material and psychological needs' of their respective diasporic communities (Vogt-William, 2009: 155).

This is where we see that migrant women entrepreneurs or intimate workers may turn a commercial site into a diasporic space by bringing other migrant women together and creating a sense of belonging. While the literature on commercial intimacy mainly focuses on migrant women who perform intimate labour for women of/in the Global North, it rarely examines what happens when migrant intimate workers perform intimate labour for their co-ethnics in the diaspora. For first-generation migrant women, in particular, a space of consumption and sociality might also evoke memories and connections with the homeland, and thereby contain the potential to be transformed into a diasporic space. While duly emphasising the racial and gendered logics that construct certain women as ideal intimate workers and others as consumers, existing literature has not managed to imagine or study migrant women from the global south as consumers. This is a gap that my research tries to address. The beauty salon is primarily a site of commerce and consumption. By taking a site of commerce as the starting point for the study of diasporic space, my study opens

up the potential to view other commercial spaces as diasporic spaces as well as pointing out their limitations in this respect.

Taken together, the notions of diasporic space and commercial intimacy enable us to think of a new grammar of space making that is beyond the public/private binary. Both these concepts dislodge the supremacy of the familial home as the only domain of intimacy and kin as the sole providers of intimacy. They also show how the meanings of a space are not fixed but dynamic and experienced differently by different people.

The beauty salon is a place of work for beauticians and a site of leisure for clients. For salon owners, as I will show, it is both an extension of the home and a workplace. In this way, a single space holds multiple meanings. Thus, instead of seeing such a space as private or public that maps onto gendered divisions of masculine and feminine, it is more productive to study this space as relational. Imagining spaces as relational or 'multidimensional, shifting and contingent' draws attention to its pluralistic nature (Armstrong & Squires, 2002: 273). As Chris Armstrong and Judith Squires point out, social spaces are not structured only by gender. The meaning of space is produced through everyday practices that reproduce various kinds of hierarchies. While the literature on commercial intimacy shows that intimate workers erect symbolic boundaries by categorising clients based on their race and class, the understanding of space as commercial as well as diasporic complicates this dimension. What kinds of hierarchies or categorisations are created within a diasporic group of consumers where the members are prima facie similar? An understanding of space based only on gender only does not explain such phenomena. In my research, therefore, I ask how race, religion and caste map onto a space understood as diasporic?

In this thesis, I will show how the beauty salon is produced as a diasporic space. Such an act of mapping space would highlight how both intimacy and boundary-making work hand-in-hand to produce a space socially.

2.5. Theoretical contributions

2.5.1. Challenging heteronormative bias in studies of intimacy in migration

Intimacy, understood as love and romance, has been acknowledged as playing an important role in people's desire to migrate and their choice of migration destination. Migration also leads to the

formation of transnational families which must then find ways of sustaining family ties across borders. A considerable body of literature in migration studies looks at the formation of transnational households and how intimate familial relations are maintained within them (See Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2005; Moukarbel, 2009). Several studies also highlight the intimate lives of migrant workers post migration. For female migrants who are discursively and legally constructed as 'just workers' not entitled to romantic or sexual lives of their own, marriage and pregnancy may become subject to state control (Constable, 2020: 3491-3492). Others have shown how the romantic and sexual lives of domestic workers are controlled not only by the state but also by employers (Moukarbel, 2009).

However, some scholars have argued that heterosexuality is taken for granted as the framework for the organisation of familial, romantic and marital relations in migration (Manalansan, 2006; Walsh, Shen & Willis, 2008). Academic research on transnational families, motherhood, remittances and changing norms of love and romance often makes heteronormative assumptions when discussing affective ties and relationships in the lives of migrants (Kosnick, 2016). Manalansan (2006), for instance, demonstrates how numerous pioneering studies on transnational intimacies have normalised and naturalised both heterosexuality and heteronormativity in their concepts and methods. There are few studies that ask if women enjoy intimacy in the country of migration outside of romantic/sexual relationships and family units.

The literature on diasporic spaces reviewed earlier looks at spaces where women enjoy intimacy and sociality with other migrant women. However, scholars have shied away from deploying the lens of intimacy to study those relationships, as intimacy remains difficult to imagine outside of the couple and familial units. In that sense, the study of intimacy, whether in heterosexual or same-sex relationships of migrant women, still suffers from a heteronormative bias. It is rather easy to imagine migrant women in the roles of girlfriends, wives, mothers and workers but not as women who enjoy sociality with other women and as paying consumers of intimacy. Using the lens of intimacy to study women's diasporic spaces, then, might allow a different imagination of migrant workers and their intimate lives.

Intimacy is a suitable framework to study beauty salons for many reasons. The beauty salon is dissociated from the home and the family but serves some of the functions traditionally associated

with the domestic sphere, such as grooming and care practices. It also reflects how intimacy is a spatial process or carves a space around itself. Women allow the beauticians to touch them on intimate areas of their body, a kind of touch that would not be permissible outside the space of the salon. A beauty salon is a paradoxical space that serves the reproduction of appropriate femininity, and thereby heterosexuality, while at the same time acting as a homosocial space that thrives on physical and emotional closeness between women. It disrupts the conventional understanding of touch in relation to private space (e.g., home) or public space (e.g., sex work) by acting as an in-between space where bodies are allowed to touch each other intimately. In a beauty salon, some of the practices of intimacy that bind women together are therapeutic and/or intimate touch, emotional closeness, and sharing of bodily information as well as personal secrets.

Finally, whether looking at heterosexual or queer people, intimacy in migration literature has always been used to understand the formation and maintenance of couples and families. Applying the framework of intimacy to a space, instead of individuals, allows the researcher to find the networks of intimacy migrant women can be part of, outside home and work. At the same time, it also allows for an intersectional analysis of that intimate network whereby race, religion, caste and class become important vectors of analysis alongside gender and migration.

2.5.2. Contribution to Diaspora Studies or the theorization of South Asian diaspora

There is little research on South Asian women's diasporic spaces in the UK. We urgently need many more studies of women's diasporic spaces if we are to have a fuller understanding of South Asian women's lives in the UK. To have a more nuanced understanding of migrant women's lives, not only must we attend to the everyday spaces that they use, but also take seriously spaces that offer opportunities for migrant women's work and leisure simultaneously.

In this study, I take a feminist approach to theorising diaspora which implies both a focus on gendered concerns in the diaspora as well as application of feminist frameworks. Tina Campt and Deborah A. Thomas (2008) ask what it means to contribute to diaspora studies through an explicitly feminist frame. They suggest that such a frame might entail raising the question of hegemony vis-à-vis diasporic formations as well as engaging with the tensions of how individuals and communities are differently situated within diasporic formations. This is only possible through paying attention

to vectors such as class, race, religions and caste alongside gender that may create inequalities and asymmetries within the diaspora.

Therefore, I am interested in the frame of intimacy. Where there is intimacy, there are also boundaries. Intimacy is only possible by keeping 'others' out. This is how intimacy also becomes the thread between the beauty salon and diasporic space. While diasporic space may also rely on intimacy, it also draws boundaries around it. The notion of boundaries is integral to diaspora space, as the politics of belonging has been defined as 'the dirty work of boundary maintenance' (Crowley, 1999: 30). As belonging is always spatial, the politics of belonging creates boundaries that are both social and spatial in nature (Trudeau, 2006). Thus, for a beauty salon to become diasporic space, there must be intimacy but there must also be socio-spatial boundaries that guard that intimacy – which is what I hope to make clear through this thesis. Instead of narrativizing the diaspora in terms of solidarity, it is important to pay attention to 'how, where, and when solidarity is imagined or refused' (Campt & Thomas, 2008: 5). Moreover, as diasporic women are usually portrayed as victims marked by racial, religious or class conflicts, studying diasporic spaces can enable an examination of what happens when diasporic women are part of structures of dominance (Koshy, 1994).

While dealing with the question of hegemony in the diaspora, it is also important to delegitimise the hegemony of India in the studies of South Asian diaspora (Das Gupta, Gupta & Teaiwa, 2007). This study aims to do so by taking as its starting point 'South Asian' salons or salons that are owned, run and visited by women from different countries in South Asia including Pakistan and Nepal so that South Asian does not end up standing in for 'Indian'. Having said that, this thesis also constantly interrogates the term 'South Asian' in order to avoid giving the impression of any neat homogeneity in the diaspora.

In asking what kinds of intimacies can transform a South Asian beauty salon into a diasporic space for women, this research addresses three distinct fields that are not usually studied together: intimacy, beauty salons and diasporic space.

Chapter 3 - Research Methodology

Between 2020 and 2022, I conducted ethnographies of two salons, which I call Noor's Hair & Beauty (on Cinnamon Road, Area A, London) and Anita's Hair & Beauty (on Bayleaf Road, Area B, London). I worked in each salon. I hung out there. I observed and participated in conversations with the salon owners, staff and clients. And I conducted interviews, sometimes multiple interviews, with the people I met.

I chose to conduct ethnographies of two hair and beauty salons. While findings in one salon could be dismissed as exceptional, and three salons would have been too much to handle, two seemed like a good number to provide useful points of comparison and facilitate sound theorisation.

In this chapter, I explain why I chose an ethnographic approach for my thesis. I go on to describe how I chose the two field sites or – in a sense - how they chose me, and the role I played in each of them in conducting this study. I then address the ethical considerations that arose in this research. In the final section, I situate the two salons in the geography of London through ethnographic description. I firmly believe that the final ethnographic product cannot be separated from the producer or the mode of production (Richardson, 2011). Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to make clear the process through which this ethnographic study has been produced and the role I have played in shaping it as the researcher.

3.1. Doing Feminist Ethnography

I decided on ethnographic research because ethnography helps a researcher understand the political, economic, historical and socio-cultural forces that create the microsocial experiences of everyday life (Harrison, 2018). It generates insights that cannot be arrived at through other methodologies by complicating and enhancing our understanding of daily human interactions and experiences. As I wanted to study the beauty salon, I had to immerse myself in that space for extended periods and that could best be achieved through the participant observation for which ethnography is so well-known. As Herbert (2000) argues, the meaning systems of a place are not overtly present but can be slowly grasped by the ethnographer through interaction and analysis. And this is what I aimed to do. Ethnographers unearth what the social group being researched takes for granted, and thereby

reveal the knowledge and meaning structures providing the blueprint for social action (Herbert, 2000).

I also wanted to adopt a feminist approach to research, aiming to 'fill in the gaps and silences surrounding women's lives and experiences' (Pillo & Mayo, 2012: 2). Key to feminist ethnography is a 'tendency to use already given situations both as the focus of investigation and as a means of collecting data' (Fonow & Cook, 1991: 11). Such an approach produces research with a focus on everyday life and the experiences of women in the spaces that surround the researcher but may not be accessible to everyone.

While there is no one definition, most scholars would agree that feminist ethnography is 'undergirded by feminist theory, which examines women's lived experiences and social roles as it seeks to overcome gender bias in research … as well as acknowledge the role of researcher in the production of knowledge' (Brown, 2012: 30). Feminist ethnography is a gift of reciprocity, not an imperial entitlement (Craft *et al.,* 2007: 67). Central to building a reciprocal process is the development of long-term relationships with those involved in the research (Pillo & Mayo, 2014). Reciprocity is based on the belief that researchers and participants are equal, and that the research should be mutually beneficial, characterised by give-and-take (Huisman, 2008).

Alongside reciprocity, feminist ethnography is also characterised by reflexivity, the belief that researchers should continually reflect about issues of power and positionality in their work (Huisman, 2008). Feminist ethnography aims to interrogate power (Davis & Craven, 2021). Therefore, thinking, reflecting and writing about relationships with participants is integral to the production of feminist ethnography. This kind of ethnography makes visible the relational aspects of research and the resultant questions, complexities and processes (Pillow & Mayo, 2012).

Feminist ethnographers, however, have also drawn attention to an irony of feminist ethnographic methods. While feminists choose ethnography over other methods because they believe it to be more in line with feminist values of reciprocity, equality, empathy and activism, the very intimate and interpersonal nature of ethnographic engagement can also inadvertently lead to more exploitation of participants than other positivist methods (Stacey, 1988). Feminist ethnography must, therefore, 'acknowledge the struggles and dilemmas behind the work' (Huisman, 2008: 374). In this spirit, I

aim to foreground the process of and challenges arising in doing this research in the subsequent sections.

3.2. Role and Access

My role in the field was determined by a practical sense of optimising my time in the setting that I wanted to observe as well as the feminist ethic of reciprocity. I had decided before starting my PhD that training in beauty work would help me blend into the setting of a beauty salon as well as being useful to the salon owners and beauticians. So I enrolled in a two-month apprenticeship in a beauty salon in New Delhi where I learnt eyebrow threading, waxing, pedicure, facial and massage. Though I cannot claim expertise in any of these services, I acquired basic skills and knowledge of how beauty salons work as well as a greater appreciation of the labour that goes into the seemingly glamourous business of making people beautiful.

Armed with these skills, on starting my PhD, I started frequenting beauty salons in the hope that gaining access would not be difficult. I focused on neighbourhoods with large South Asian populations and compiled a list of beauty salons in those areas using Google and beauty service aggregator application, Treatwell. I went to the salons on my list as well as ones I happened upon when I was in the area. Instead of broaching the topic of research upfront, I usually asked for a pedicure or a head massage and made conversation with the owner or staff at the salon to get a sense of the place. If it instinctively seemed like a salon that would be conducive to research (friendly owner, not too quiet in terms of footfall etc.), I then explained my research and asked if they would allow me to conduct it in their salon. I was initially denied access at a number of places. Owing to South Asian politeness and a cultural squeamishness about saying no directly, I never got to know the reason for the refusal except for one salon owner who said, 'My husband said that you might make a video and put it up on Youtube'. I suspect that most of them saw research as a dubious enterprise, one that would invite unnecessary trouble into their salon.

One day whilst I was returning despondent from a visit to one high street in London after unsuccessfully attempting to recruit at a few beauty salon owners, I spotted Noor's Hair & Beauty. Without expecting much, I walked in and explained my research to the woman sitting behind the reception. She was talking on the phone in Urdu, presumably to her relatives in Pakistan, but cut the call short to hear me out. 'What days of the week can you come?' her response was so immediate

and enthusiastic that I had trouble believing my ears. I checked again if she understood what my research would entail. 'Yes, why should I mind? I am happy to help you with your PhD,' she said. I would later find out that Noor was short-staffed as one of her assistants had recently left. But I was happy to help her a few days a week in return for her accommodating my participant observation.

Since Noor's Hair and Beauty was owned, staffed and frequented by Muslim women from Pakistan and Afghanistan, I looked for a second salon that would differ in its attributes so as to provide a useful point of comparison with respect to South Asian women. My quest therefore began all over again. After several rejections, I walked into Anita's Hair & Beauty in a predominantly Indian neighbourhood in London one afternoon. Present were Anita, the owner from Nepal and Rekha, a beautician from India. When I explained my research to them, they readily agreed. They did not, however, need or expect my assistance in return. 'So many women from the neighbourhood come and sit here for hours on end, we don't mind having you over either if it helps with your research,' Anita said. Although I was initially sceptical about the 'observer' role, it was indeed so common for women to treat the salon as a social space that I did not feel or apparently seem out of place. I also did not feel that I was being a burden because I could switch to a participant (helper) role as soon as I saw that the staff could use an extra pair of hands.

While I did not realise it right then, in my quest for two different salons that could give me a taste of the diversity in South Asian salons, I had chosen two salons that would reveal themselves as 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' spaces. They were also slightly different in terms of the racial and class composition of their clientele. While Noor's Hair & Beauty received both middle- and working-class clients, the clientele of Anita's Hair & Beauty was primarily working class. Noor's also received white and black women in addition to its main clientele of South Asian women whereas Anita's was a predominantly South Asian clientele. While my thesis was not meant to be and is not a comparative study of two beauty salons, these differences have enriched my study by allowing me to bring a comparative element in making sense of the findings to theorise the South Asian salon as a diasporic space.

3.3. Participant Observation

Participant observation entails spending long periods of time watching people and talking to them about what they are doing, thinking and saying (Delamont, 2011). Participant observation is 'a process that oscillates between varying degrees of participation and observation' (Harrison, 2018:

20). While the degree of participation involved is highly debated among ethnographers, participant observation usually does not mean 'real participation' – the job of the researcher is to watch and 'help' occasionally (Delamont, 2011: 4). However, it is important to participate enough to be able to 'write feelingly about the nature of the work: its pains and pleasures, smells and sounds, physical and mental stresses' (*ibid.*).

Following this principle, I conducted 450 hours of participant observation over two years: 250 hours at Noor's Hair & Beauty and 200 hours at Anita's Hair & Beauty. For me, participant observation meant partial immersion in the field. As Noor's Hair & Beauty was close to my accommodation, I went there on the days when Noor needed help, usually 2-3 days a week. I normally spent 2-5 hours in the salon on each visit. As commuting to Anita's Hair & Beauty from my house took 1.5 hours, I went there once a week and typically spent 6-8 hours in the salon. Since most of my fieldwork took place during the coronavirus pandemic, I conducted the participant observation in an irregular fashion, making the most of the months between national lockdowns.

At Noor's Hair & Beauty, Noor viewed and treated me as an assistant, which meant that when the salon was busy, I was on my feet giving clients a hair wash, preparing them for haircuts by combing their hair and putting on aprons, making them tea or coffee, sweeping the floor after haircuts and emptying the bins. Although I liked busy days as it gave me a lot to observe, the sheer physicality of the labour exhausted me and gave me a sense of how hard the job of a beautician was. On some days, all I found time for was recording quick memos on my phone that I then typed up into proper fieldnotes sitting in a café as soon as I had left the salon. In comparison, fieldwork at Anita's Hair & Beauty felt relaxed and breezy. On most days, I sat in the waiting area of the salon, observing, taking notes on my phone and talking to beauticians and clients. Anita asked me to help her only when the salon was short-staffed, and the work was limited to light tasks such as making tea, taking payment from clients and reminding them about COVID regulations. As Anita had told me at the outset, it was common for women from the neighbourhood to spend time in the salon without requesting a beauty service, which made it acceptable and unremarkable for me to do the same.

As participant observation also entails engaging with those being observed to ask them what they are doing and why, I soon found that spending time in the beauty salons meant that I had more access to the salon owners and beauticians than clients who visited for a short time (Delamont, 2011).

Since it was easier for me to build relationships with salon owners and beauticians compared to clients, the study privileges their perspective. Even though I built trust and rapport with many regular clients of the two salons, the fact that I was able to spend only short periods of time with them proved a limitation to my conducting in-depth observation of their lives. None of the clients invited me to their homes or offered to meet me outside the salon. In contrast, my relationship with salon owners and beauticians involved visiting their houses and meeting them for meals outside the salon.

3.3.1. Fieldnotes

In an ethnographic study, the importance of writing fieldnotes cannot be overstated. Fieldnotes typically chronicle settings, people and activities (Merriam, 1988). The act of writing fieldnotes turns the 'momentary encounters of participant-observation' to an 'inscribed account that can be reconsulted' (Rapport, 1991: 10). In the salons, I jotted down quick keywords and mental impressions on the notes application of my phone which I then typed up and expanded into coherent recollections, reflections and analyses on my computer, sitting in cafes at the end of the day or at home. The memos I took in the salons included keywords to remember details of every client who visited while I was there, their actions and the conversations that took place between them and the beauticians, conversations between beauticians, conversations where I was involved and how they made me feel. While in the beginning, not knowing what I was looking for, I made detailed notes about every client who visited, I soon developed an eye for what was relevant to my thesis. As themes began to emerge in the first fifty pages of fieldnotes – the meaning of beauty for first-generation South Asian migrant women, differential treatment of white and black customers in the salon, display of religiosity in the salons etc. – I took more detailed notes on interactions related to those themes than others. Based on informed decisions that the ethnographer makes, the focus of ethnographic investigation and note-taking narrows down over time (Wolfinger, 2002). It is indicative of how writing fieldnotes is an act of selection, translation and narration in itself (Rapport, 1991). By deciding what to focus their attention on, what to document and in how much detail, the ethnographer already applies a level of selective analysis at the participant observation stage itself (Wolfinger, 2002). At the same time, I kept an open mind and was careful to be receptive to any novel themes arising, some of which – like mother-daughter relationships in the beauty salon and postfeminist ideas of body hair removal - eventually did not make it into this thesis.

While being aware of how my subjectivity, preferences and biases were determining the research process, I tried to be rigorous and detailed in the process of writing fieldnotes that resulted in four hundred double-spaced pages of rich and varied data. These recorded observations form the backbone of this study.

3.4. Interviews

I aimed to conduct repeat interviews with beauticians and regular customers at the salons, after a few months of participant observation. Repeat interviewing with the same participant builds trust and rapport, allows room for reflection between interviews, and allows for further in-depth exploration and clarification in subsequent interviews (Earthy & Cronin, 2016). I was able to conduct 25 formal interviews, eight of which were with clients and the rest with salon owners and beauticians. While my conversations with salon owners and beauticians made for rich data from both formal interviews (recorded) and informal chats (conversations that were recorded in fieldnotes), the number of clients I managed to formally interview during a two-year study is rather small. This leads me to a discussion of the limitations of the interview method, particularly in the context of beauty salons.

To begin with, time proved to be a major constraint for the working-class participants in my research. As they squeezed time out for a beauty salon visit between their care responsibilities at home and shifts in the factory, they were not in the mood for drawn-out conversations with a researcher. Some of them simply may not have wanted to speak to a researcher but did not say so explicitly. When I asked to meet outside the salon for an interview, nearly all the clients cited lack of free time as the reason for their inability to do so. Given these major constraints, the few interviews that I managed with clients while they were undergoing beauty treatments at the salon similarly failed to yield rich data. Not only was there little room for clients to freely express their thoughts in the presence of salon owners and beauticians, but also the strangeness of having to formulate their thoughts vis-à-vis topics one does not usually give much thought to in everyday life.

Questions related to conceptual understandings that are rarely discussed in everyday conversation pose a challenge in formal interviews (Barton, 2015). Interview as a method reduces the complexity of people's lives by asking them to sum things up in a succinct answer format. While I found it easier to get women to answer, 'Why did you migrate to the UK?' it was not easy to get them to think about

why they preferred a particular salon or beautician or why they opted for particular beauty services. My question 'Why do you straighten your hair despite how painful it is?' was often met with responses such as 'Because I like it'. Moreover, it is acknowledged in feminist thought that as language itself reflects male experiences, there is a lack of fit between women's everyday lives and the words available for talking about them (Devault, 1990).

Another difficult realisation I came to is that owing to the patriarchal contexts South Asian women come from, many of us have been discouraged from having opinions and more so, from expressing them publicly. Many of the participants were much more forthcoming when talking about the private sphere – husband, kids, in-laws - but became reticent when asked about other topics, as they lacked confidence in the value of their opinion. This was best evidenced in what salon owner Anita had to say to me at the beginning of my research when I asked to interview her, 'What can I tell you in an interview? How many kids do I have? How did I make them?' Her self-deprecatory remark showed what many women thought about themselves – that they had nothing much to contribute to academic research. Women's perception of the value of their speech is also shaped by the male presumption that women's speech can be treated as trivial (Devault, 1990). This, then, becomes one of the many obstacles that stops women from speaking fully.

When it comes to the artificial and constructed nature of formal interviews, in particular, limited social experience and lack of interactional confidence can make participants anxious and apprehensive (Bahn & Barratt-Pugh, 2013). I also had to take into account the difference in class background and educational attainment between me and the participants that might have made them even more uncomfortable and reticent. Sometimes, stilted answers result from a probing by academic researchers that resembles schooling (Barton, 2015). Many participants, including beauticians, who were articulate in informal conversations became anxious and monosyllabic as soon as the formal interview commenced. I often ended up telling them not to treat it like a school exam although I could not shrug off the feeling myself that a formal interview – with me asking them questions and recording their answers – did indeed feel like one.

To make matters worse, there was covid. My fieldwork was conducted during a period when there were two national lockdowns in the UK, each lasting over a couple of months. Moreover, uncertainty over if/when the next lockdown would be announced always loomed large. While this did not affect

my relationship with the salon owners who were always there when I went to the salon, it did affect the possibility of building relationships with clients. It had an impact on the salon visit pattern of regular clients, some of whom stopped coming to the salon altogether when lockdowns were lifted. These patterns also became erratic and unpredictable during the pandemic which made it difficult for my fieldwork day to coincide with, say, the visit of a particular client I was hoping to speak with.

Finally, I cannot dismiss the possibility that the whole enterprise of academic research in a beauty salon, the focus of my research on beauty salons as diasporic space and the questions I was asking might have felt irrelevant, even ridiculous to the participants given their more immediate concerns in life: housing, jobs and visas. This feeling on my part only ended up emphasising the social distance between me as the researcher and the participants in my research. In the end, I abandoned approaching clients for formal interviews and relied instead on notetaking after an informal conversation with each of them.

3.5. Data Analysis

In ethnography, data analysis is the practice of translating observations into text. As ethnography is an inductive-iterative process, it does not follow a linear sequence of data collection, analysis and writing (O'Reilly, 2009). In my research, data collection, analysis and writing happened as simultaneous processes: I continually analysed my fieldnotes and interviews as I went along, using them to inform further data collection. I also wrote several drafts of each empirical chapter, which were revised and fine-tuned as data collection and analysis progressed. Ethnography as an 'inductive-iterative' process moves back and forth between theory and analysis, data and interpretation (O'Reilly, 2009: 105).

I began coding data manually as soon as I had generated a critical mass of fieldnotes. I read my fieldnotes regularly and rigorously, highlighting and annotating themes that stood out. These highlights then guided further data collection. As Maggie MacLure (2013: 175) puts it, during the process of coding, 'some things gradually grow, or glow, into greater significance than others, and become the preoccupations around which thought and writing cluster'. In ethnography, however, coding only gives rise to 'provisional and partial taxonomies' that allow us to recognise coding 'not as a static representation or translation of a world laid out before us on the operating table of analysis, but as an open-ended and ongoing practice of making sense' (MacLure, 2013: 181).

The next stage of coding and interpretation in my research happened at the stage of writing. In ethnography, writing is a mode of analysis in its own right (Richardson, 2011). When writing a chapter, I began with a central theoretical point and put down on the page all the related ethnographic vignettes from my fieldnotes. But as I wrote and rewrote, I added more layers of interpretation or analysis into the narrative. Whenever in doubt, I went back to my fieldnotes and interview transcripts to read, highlight and annotate them anew, to see if I had missed something or needed to consider something in a new light. This process of moving back and forth between fieldnotes, literature and the drafts of my empirical chapters gave me confidence that I had done the best I could with the data I had collected. As Richardson (2011: 822) notes, in ethnography, there is no such thing as 'getting it right', there is only 'getting it' -- with nuance.

Ethnographers are often accused of obscuring the data analysis process and generating an unrealistically tidy picture of the messy and contingent reality of daily life (Herbert, 2000). So as not to seem vague or mysterious about the process of data analysis in my research, I will illustrate it by giving an example. Before going to the field, I had read up on the South Asian diaspora in the UK and the processes of community formation and maintenance in the diaspora. I was not, however, prepared for what I was about to find about relations between black people (of British, Afro-Caribbean or other origins) and South Asians. Admittedly, there is not a lot of literature on this subject. Reading my early fieldnotes, I became convinced that racial tension between South Asian beauticians and black clients was a prominent theme. Thereafter, I began to pay detailed attention to every interaction with a black client in the salon to look for patterns and disruptions, as well as seeking out relevant literature. In the face of the scant literature available, what helped me make sense of my initial observations was coming across Shirley Tate's (2014) work on the 'disattendability' of black bodies in UK academia. Drawing on the concept of disattendability, I wrote an early draft of the chapter on race in the South Asian salon. Subsequently, it was my supervisors' feedback that made me connect my observations on the treatment of black women in the South Asian beauty salon to my overall thesis on diasporic space for South Asian women – a process that took place over multiple drafts where writing itself became a mode of analysis.

3.6. Ethics

3.6.1. Consent

Informed consent in ethnography is a highly contested topic. It is neither achievable nor demonstrable through 'bureaucratic regulation' derived from clinical or biomedical research (Murphy & Dingwall, 2007: 2223). I decided that oral consent would be culturally more appropriate for the participants I was working with. The participants might suspect that signing a consent form would commit them to something they might not want to commit to, whatever the words on the form actually said. Making them sign a consent form would, thereby, hamper trust instead of building it. Oral consent would not only avoid potential embarrassment to participants who were illiterate but also safeguard those who might be undocumented or who might at least not have the correct papers as migrants. According to the American Anthropological Association's Statement on Ethnography and Institutional Review Boards (IRB) 2004, 'it is often not appropriate to obtain consent through a signed form-for example, where people are illiterate or where there is a legacy of human rights abuses creating an atmosphere of fear, or where the act of signing one's name converts a friendly discussion into a hostile circumstance'. Arguing thus, I was able to get approval for oral consent in my research.

The basic tenets of informed consent -- communication and comprehension of information -- although seemingly straightforward, could be highly complicated in a research site such as those in which I worked. In many cases, even after repeated explanations, clients took me to be an apprentice in beauty work. They roughly understood that I was part of some sort of university setup, and that I was speaking to them as part of my academic work, but they were not familiar with the idea of a PhD. Most of them did not even bother with my explanations. Over the course of time, I realised that with the exception of the salon owners and a couple of clients I met in the salons whose own children were going to university, none of the participants were familiar with academic research. Coming from working-class or rural backgrounds, most of them had not been to college. Going beyond the hubris of institutional requirements, I had to learn how to break down my research into the most direct and simple terms for their understanding. I told them that I was researching the importance of beauty salons in the lives of South Asian migrant women. Despite that, finding it rather ludicrous that a beauty salon could be a site of sociological study, some of them continued to believe that I was interested in learning beauty work after all.

Consent at the start of research is in any case at best provisional, as the research questions evolve during the ethnography and with time spent in the field. As Paul Atkinson writes, 'if the outcomes

of an ethnography were entirely predictable, then there would be virtually no point in conducting the research at all' (2009: 21). Therefore, consent must be negotiated and renegotiated over time as the relationships between the ethnographer and the participants develop (Plankey-Videla, 2012). While I made sure that both the salon owners – Noor and Anita – as well as the beauticians working with them understood what my research was about at the outset, I also continually reminded them of it by talking about my findings. It was easy as both Anita and Noor monitored my progress by periodically asking how far my research had progressed and what was I working on at any given point in time. I was assured of their ongoing consent through their help, co-operation and assent (Zavisca, 2007).

With regard to clients, I treated consent as a multi-stage process. Keeping in mind the economic interest of the salon owners, it was not practical to introduce myself as a researcher to each and every client who came to the salon. The ethnographer is required to respond sensitively to situations; in some circumstances, it is more appropriate simply to interact and observe than to make an announcement that says, in effect, "Attention! You are all being observed as part of a research study!" (Morse & Field, 1998: 346). I introduced myself and the study to every client I spoke with, whether formally or informally. I always introduced myself to a client if I served them in any capacity, such as washing their hair. Over time, all the regular clients came to know who I was and what I was doing in the salon. That said, I was never fully sure that the clients understood what participant observation really entailed, or if they would have consented to being observed if they knew exactly what I was writing in my fieldnotes. While I did the best I could in the given circumstances, the nature of observation is so inherently skewed towards the researcher that I was never entirely sure of having the participants' fully informed consent the way it is conceptualised by Institutional Review Boards. What I believe I had was a degree of consent that the participants felt to be acceptable, without thinking it through in anxious detail.

All the same, I must point out here the public nature of neighbourhood South Asian salons. Both Noor's and Anita's salons, due to shortage of space but also by design, lacked privacy. The interactions and conversation in both these salons were communal in nature. Women often shared their secrets with the beautician without worrying about who else was within earshot. Personal secrets became topics of discussion between all the women present in the salon. While that was hardly an excuse for me as researcher to make a note of anything and everything I heard and

observed by virtue of my presence, it also showed that privacy might not have been the biggest concern for women who came to the salon. Consequently, my hanging out to observe and take notes might not have been construed as a threat, and I was certainly not going to do anything to betray the confidence effectively placed in me.

Participant observation can also become an issue of ethical concern when the researcher stops being noticed (Watts, 2011). As I built and nurtured familiarity through regular presence in the salons, it was an ongoing challenge for me to establish that I was there for work. On days when I was merely conducting participant observation, women at the salon thought I was taking a day off work. Although I tried explaining to them that for me being in the salon was work as I was observing what was happening, it did not make much sense from their perspective. How could someone just hanging out in the salon all day, occasionally even getting beauty treatments, be at work!

Thus, there are concerns inherent in ethnographic methods that run counter to feminist values. The biggest issue for me was the lack of voice participants had in what was recorded in the fieldnotes. There is no way participants can be kept abreast of everything that goes into the ethnographer's fieldnotes, which gives a great degree of power to the researcher who wields complete control over the recorded data. Another issue was that sometimes I could not help but register the little flicker of excitement in my heart when I witnessed an encounter that was unpleasant or conflictual, but interesting for me as I knew it would make for rich data. In asking whether ethnography can ever be feminist, Judith Stacey (1988: 23) points out that 'the lives, loves, and tragedies that fieldwork informants share with a researcher are ultimately data'. I felt the same way about data generated from participant observation.

Maintaining confidentiality is an underpinning rule of qualitative research which I hope redresses some of the conflicts caused by participants' lack of agency in what is recorded about them (Watts, 2011). I have been careful about using pseudonyms for the salons and the participants from the very beginning of the research. I do not use the real names of the neighbourhoods or the streets either, so as to make doubly sure that the salons and the participants cannot be identified. While there is some academic and statistical material available on the demographics of the two neigbourhooods, I have chosen to be selective and vague about the use of such material to avoid identification.

3.6.2. Reflexivity and reciprocity

A feminist epistemology acknowledges the world to be socially constructed, consisting of multiple perspectives and realities. Reflexivity, then, allows the researcher to see how their interpretation of the world is mediated by the self – their biography as well as theoretical inclinations. When the subjectivity and location of the knower are included in the research process, the research produces diverse knowledges instead of validating any one truth about the world (Hesse-Bibber & Piatelli, 2014).

Reflexivity as an epistemic approach takes into account the ambiguity and messiness of the research process. It speaks to an 'epistemology of contradiction' which means that as scholars, we should foreground the complexities and tensions we encounter in the process of fieldwork much more than we are accustomed to doing (O'Brien, 2010). Taking this approach means interweaving reflexivity throughout the ethnography.

Attending to messiness also implies moving past the dichotomy of insider-outsider in the field. Both insiders and outsiders must contend with methodological issues around access, positionality, self-presentation and the situated knowledge they possess as a result of their social location (Chavez, 2008). Neither position has an inherent advantage over the other. Moreover, insider or outsider are not fixed but unstable and ever-shifting positions, differentially experienced and expressed (Naples, 1996). Researchers can only come to understand themselves as insiders and outsiders by reflexively examining the continuously shifting nature of their role in the field (Hesse-Bibber & Piatelli, 2014).

As a South Asian woman, the processes of accessing the field and establishing trust were relatively easy for me. My participants and I shared the same gender and race. Like them, I was also a first-generation migrant in the UK and therefore shared their unique vantage point of familiarity with two cultures and societies. I felt an easy intimacy, comfort and connection with other South Asian women. In terms of markers of identity, in both the salons, the questions I was often asked were which religion I belonged to (Hindu), which region of India I came from (north India) and what was my mother tongue (Bengali). I do not remember ever being asked about my caste or my last name that would indicate my caste position.

I was more familiar with the cultural context at Anita's Hair & Beauty on account of being a Hindu woman from India. When ethnography is conducted in familiar environments, the job of the researcher is to defamiliarise and deconstruct what is taken for granted (Harrison, 2018). Therefore,

as my research progressed, I became increasingly invested in deconstructing Hindu religiosity and upper-caste values in the formation of South Asian diasporic space. Even though I am a non-practising Hindu, both my religion and religiosity were taken for granted and never interrogated in this salon.

At Noor's Hair & Beauty, however, on the first day itself I was barraged with questions. Did I believe in an afterlife? Did I believe in judgement day? Was I not afraid of God? As the opportunity to ask personal questions to a Hindu woman from India was a novelty for Noor, God and religion came up extensively in our early conversations. Our common culture, however, trumped our religious differences. Noor and I had both grown up in similar kinds of environments where sons were valued highly over daughters and sharing how common our experiences were created an instant bonding between us.

My conversations with most of the participants in the two salons were carried out in Hindi or Urdu, peppered with Punjabi, Gujarati and Bengali. English dialogue and verbatim quotes in this thesis have all been translated by me from the languages in which they were originally spoken, unless I have indicated that they took place in English. In that regard, while I had the privilege of conversing with the participants in their first or second language, I also exercised the power of translation by making their stories available for an English readership. Not many of the participants would, however, be able to read this thesis in English.

There were other things, too, that the participants and I did not share or understand about each other. I grew certain over time that there was enormous social distance between us. While I too came from a fairly simple family, the social and cultural capital I had accrued through my education and work over the years was visible in my comportment, accent and clothes, and situated me as a middle-class researcher. My status as a highly educated women positioned me as a privileged expert wherein my advice was sought on various matters. In fact, my class and education became instrumental in accomplishing my research. The salon owners as well as the beauticians spoke to me because they wanted to associate with a 'highly educated' woman. They shared their stories with me because they held me in high regard. Some of them also shared their personal secrets with me because they thought of me as an outsider who was intimate enough to be confided in but not part of their social

or familial circles. They trusted me not to relay these secrets to anyone and I have honoured their trust.

At the same time, I was also patronised on other occasions on account of my marital status (or lack thereof) and as someone who had little idea about 'real' life outside of academia. I was showered with taunts on how carefree I was in my 30s. Just as an example, one day as I made to go home, Noor remarked, 'Why are you in a hurry? Not like you have to cook for your husband or feed your child'. Another day, plucking out a grey hair from my eyebrow, Anita said to me, 'At your age, I was cradling a child. You are not even doing that. Don't mind, I am just saying'. Thus, I alternated between feeling as though I was a friend to them and someone they struggled with occasionally. But that did not stop the salon owners and beauticians from seeking my advice on matters related to their families because of my perceived education and wisdom. One thing that was clear to me was that they had immense respect for me that only tipped the power im/balance in my favour as the researcher.

3.6.3. Friendship and intimacy in the field

In feminist research, prevalent models of rapport have been criticised for being instrumental, hierarchical, and non-reciprocal -- essentially masculine (Oakley, 1981). Replacing rapport with friendship, however, has also been accused of insincerity wherein researchers create fake friendships in the field to get the job done and to advance their careers (Duncombe & Jessop, 2012). Friendship becomes a tool for the researcher to set the agenda and manage consent on the field. As Judith Stacey (1988) warns, the greater the intimacy and the apparent mutuality of the relationship between the researcher and participants, the greater is the danger.

At the same time, ethnographic research calls for a greater personal commitment to the field and the participants than virtually any other mode of research. Ethnographers spend months and sometimes years of their lives working closely with the participants as they go about their daily lives (Atkinson, 2009: 25). Therefore, I believe that for an ethnographer, forming friendships in the field is unavoidable. So too is reaping the advantage that friendship might accrue on data gathering. That makes it all the more important not only to be reflexive about such friendships but also to retain a political commitment towards them.

For me, friendship also meant maintaining a spirit of reciprocity wherein self-disclosure and sharing was not a one-way street. In that respect, there was some initially degree of insincerity on my part as I could not reveal all the facets of my personality and my life to the participants, considering their conservative cultural mores. I hid from them my relationship with a white man and the fact that I was living with him during fieldwork. In an interesting turn of events, I had to confide in Noor as during one of the coronavirus lockdowns she was one of the few people in my vicinity to whom I could turn as a witness who could sign our rental agreement. Her reaction was one of support and understanding – she said that although she did not think it was right to live with a man outside of marriage, she trusted me to make the right decisions for myself. At Anita's Hair & Beauty, I subsequently told Anita and the other beauticians about my relationship but not that we lived together as I perceived that to be too risky. Perhaps I was being overly cautious but I will never know how would I have been perceived had I 'come clean' about my personal life. My personal life evoked curiosity from the salon owners, beauticians and clients alike, so I had to be careful about how much I disclosed so as not to lose their trust. Over time, my partner ended up visiting both the salons with me as Anita, Noor and the other beauticians had expressed a desire to meet him, and he was made to feel very welcome by everyone.

Despite this acknowledgement of my deception, I do not believe it to be any different from 'real life' friendships, where self-disclosure takes place as a gradual process. Moreover, far too often, power is assumed to flow only in one direction in the field. The participants also exercised their agency with me in a similar manner, at times even producing false narratives about their lives initially and opening up to me only once a degree of trust had been established between us. My friendships with the participants have also resulted in disclosures that were deeply personal in nature. In such cases, I have been mindful not to treat such disclosures as data and have made that explicit to the participants as well.

I managed to form a few deeper friendships in the field, especially with the salon owners. I do not believe these friendships to be transactional. Anita and I share a birthday. We have been exchanging gifts every year since we met. I call her Anita 'ji' (a mark of respect in Hindi), to return the respect that she has given me from the very start. She has always wanted to help me with my research without expecting anything in return. 'What if you don't find what you need in this salon?' she asked me a few times during fieldwork, as though it was her responsibility to make sure that I did do so.

On days that I worked long hours to help her in the salon, she offered me free beauty treatments in return. I visit her whenever I am in London.

I refer to Noor as 'baji' or elder sister in Urdu. She has behaved like an older sister with me, making me work hard but also looking after me. While Anita offered to make me chai when I visited during my research, Noor asked me to go buy milk and make *her* chai. She also made me run time-consuming errands for her which made me feel a little exploited at times. All the same, she spoilt me with food, home-cooked as well as from restaurants. She calls me regularly to check on me and has also visited me in Paris where I was living after completing the fieldwork. As she had never travelled outside the UK, she trusted me to be her guide on her first solo travel.

Time is a marker of sincere friendships. One of the ways to distinguish fake friendship from real ones is that while fake friendships are temporary, real friendship, characterised by emotional empathy, continues over time (Duncombe & Jessop, 2012). The friendships I made in the field have lasted well beyond my fieldwork. My friends and I have made ourselves available for each other much more widely, for mutual help or to have fun together. I have also kept in touch with a few other participants by texting or calling them at regular intervals.

Some of the friendships I made in the field, with part-time beauticians and clients, have on the other hand felt slightly inauthentic and asymmetrical. They have also faded over time. I have often wondered if I would have been friends with the women in question had it not been for this research? Would I have enjoyed their company, just as friends? Writing about oral history interviews, Daphne Patai (1991: 142) discusses how 'an intimacy (or the appearance of intimacy) is generated that blurs any neat distinction between "research" and "personal relations"'. While I have been conscious of this appearance of intimacy, the brevity and low intensity of our engagement has also minimised the risk for these participants. While Anita and Noor were constants in the field, the high turnover rate of beauticians in both the salons and the fleeting nature of client visits meant that my research did not require a great deal of investment from other participants (unlike the demands of oral history interviews). Thus, the risk of people feeling emotionally attached to me and therefore betrayed after fieldwork has also been minimal.

3.6.4. Representation

As ethnographers, we clearly have a responsibility to those we portray (Atkinson, 2009). It is, then, unfortunate that the ethnographer must take encounters that 'exist only in their moments of occurrence' and turn them into knowledge (Rapport, 1991: 10). The use of the ethnographical present tense does the work of freezing individuals within a particular temporal and political context (Fabian, 1983). Ethnographic research and writing end up objectifying persons and momentary experiences. In doing so, they also solidify the power difference between observers and those observed, writers and those about whom they write/those they write about (Olalde & Velho, 2011).

The findings of chapter 8, 'Contingent Intimacy' made me the most uncomfortable vis-à-vis my power and responsibility as an ethnographer. It was a reminder that even though a researcher may wish to establish an egalitarian relationship with participants, she also has the power to determine what is recorded and at what moment as well as how things are interpreted. I discuss these specific ethical dilemmas further in Chapters 8 and 9.

Finally, I have no investment in 'radical pretence' about the democracy of the research process or of academic research empowering participants in any way (Back, 2007: 18). As Liza Schuster (2015: 19) poignantly puts it, 'most people are too mired in the quotidian challenges of working, caring for families, living to be able to locate our experiences – migratory or otherwise – within a broader social context'. Sociologists, on the other hand, have the luxury of time to read, reflect and write about social phenomena. I have been humbled by the experience of researching migrant-run beauty salons and getting to know about working-class migrant women's lives in London. As I was clear in my mind that the only person this thesis was ever going to benefit was me, I tried to give back to the participants in practical ways through volunteering my time in the beauty salons to help women with the administrative work involved in applying for jobs, visa appointments and so on.

I continually grapple with the question of how to balance intellectual rigour with moral commitment in academia. In order to address the challenge in the context of this research, I also obtained funds for and facilitated a series of workshops in both salons on gender roles and stereotypes, domestic violence and sexual and reproductive health. The aim of the workshops, which were attended by the salon owners and all the beauticians who worked in the salons at the time, was to create awareness and facilitate conversation on issues that often come up between beauticians and clients so that they

could advise their clients in a more informed manner. These workshops were highly appreciated by the attendees and generated valuable conversations on topics concerning women's everyday lives.

3.6.5. Some clarifications on terms used in this thesis

Here, I aim to clarify the usage of three terms in this thesis: 'working-class', 'black' and 'affect'.

I did not ask participants to discuss their class status. So, when I describe people as working-class in this thesis, I use their education and occupation to identify them as such. I am fully aware that class identification is a complex process, especially for migrants. Some of these participants may have identified themselves as middle class based on their class status in their country of origin. In countries like India, 'middle class' is defined very broadly, based on income and consumption patterns (Sridharan, 2010). The criteria for qualifying as middle class also differ significantly between countries because of 'international cultural and economic variations' (Roy, 2018: 32).

Gender and race both co-construct class. Many of the participants in my study were not involved in paid employment before coming to the UK, mostly because of conservative social norms. But once they came to the UK, these women joined the labour force. They were driven by a desire to earn money but also realised that it was not possible to support a family on just the male member's income in the UK. Many were also responsible for sending remittances to family members back home. Lacking educational qualifications and college degrees, they found work in manual occupations such as factory work, cleaning, cooking and childminding. Some of the migrant women from South Asia are educated but their qualifications are not transferable, obliging them to take up the same occupations as their less-well-educated counterparts. In effect, while they experience an increased capacity to earn (when compared to what they were earning in their country of origin), they suffer from downward social mobility. This is what Rhacel Parrenas (2001: 195) has called 'contradictory class mobility', referring to the trajectories of migrant women who achieve a higher income in Western countries by performing work that is deemed low status. Given this complex background, I have called women 'working-class' in this research when they do not have a college degree and work in manual occupations.

While it is more common these days to use 'Black' for people racialised as such in some academic texts, particularly those published in the USA, I have used 'black' in this thesis. I made this choice to

show that black and white are both historical constructions, and whatever rule applies to one should apply to the other (Appiah, 2020). Using 'Black' somehow seems to naturalise 'white' as a racial category. I have therefore used the terms 'black women' and 'white women' in this thesis.

The literature on 'affect' is too broad to be reviewed in this thesis. However, it is still important to clarify my understanding of the terms affect and affective labour concisely, as they make several appearances in this thesis. I understand affect as emotions that do not belong to individuals but circulate between bodies (Ahmed, 2004). Affect alerts us to the work that emotions do in mediating the relationship between the individual and the collective, instead of merely being a psychological disposition (*ibid.*). In the context of the beauty salon, affect can neither be reduced to the emotional labour performed by beauticians nor to feelings such as relaxation that emerge in clients. I understand affective labour as a work of co-production between the beautician and the client, as affect denotes the capacities of bodies to affect and be affected through encounters between them (Kolehmainen & Mäkinen, 2021).

3.7. Setting the Scene

In this section, I aim to provide a sense of the spatio-temporal setting of my research that will set the scene for the empirical chapters to come.

3.7.1. The covid pandemic

As my research was conducted between 2020 and 2022, barring three months at Noor's Hair & Beauty, this entire period was marked by the coronavirus pandemic. It was amusing to conduct research on 'diasporic space and intimacy' at a time when our understandings of both spatiality and intimacy had undergone a monumental change. At the same time, when I was the beauty salons, it felt like very little had changed in real terms. Each time after the lockdown, salon staff showed enthusiasm for wearing masks, frequently sanitising their hands and putting certain social-distancing measures in place, which only lasted for a few days. While we (salon owners, staff, clients and me) did endlessly discuss the pandemic, trying to make sense of what was happening around us, it hardly made a difference to how we conducted ourselves. Life went on as usual in the salons. For a short while, Noor substituted eyebrow threading services with eyebrow waxing (more details in Chapter 8), which still required the beautician to be very close to the client's face. The beauty

industry coped with the crisis in strange and innovative ways. Interestingly, when I visited a salon in India during this period, I found that the beauticians were providing eyebrow threading by wrapping the thread around their necks (very risky!) instead of holding it between their lips.

While the expectation was that the beautician's touch would be stigmatised during the pandemic, that did not turn out to be the case. More than one client proclaimed, 'If I am going to die of the virus, might as well get my eyebrows done'. When one of my supervisors sent me an email saying that I must track what happens in the salon as 'touch' becomes a taboo, I jotted down in my fieldnotes:

> I wasn't clearly thinking, nor was any client who came to the salon yesterday! All of them got their eyebrows and upper lips done which necessitated a sniffling Noor to stand very close to them and touch their faces. What the hell, even I got my eyebrows done! What sort of cognitive dissonance is this? I am trying so hard not to touch my face and am constantly washing my hands…but I did not want to interrupt my beauty regimen, nor did Noor's touch strike me as unsafe!' (March 15, 2020)

Having said that, the pandemic did affect the potential for intimacy in the field in some other ways. While salon owners were supported through the government's small grants for businesses during the lockdown, the beauticians found themselves in extremely precarious situations. As a result, after the first and the second lockdowns, most of the beauticians that I had got to know did not return to work and new ones were hired. As for clients, their attitudes towards the beauty salon cannot be separated from their overall response to the coronavirus pandemic. Some who were elderly or with preexisting conditions, as part of their reduced mobility, stopped coming to the salon altogether. Most, however, came back after the first lockdown. Some sooner than others. The heightened anxiety before and after the first lockdown wore down as the pandemic progressed. The salons, however, lost some of their regular clients after the second lockdown as well and raised the prices of the services to compensate for the interruptions and uncertainty. The pandemic by then had become a normal state of living. As my research was conducted entirely during this period, due to the lack of a reference point or a 'before', this was also the 'normal' background in which I did my fieldwork, something that might be useful to remember while reading this thesis.

3.7.2. The neighbourhoods

Even though the latest census in the UK was conducted in 2021, the data available on borough council websites date back to 2011. While one can assume that there may have been significant demographic changes in the intervening thirteen years, the figures are still a good indication of the ethnic makeup of the areas in which the salons are located. The census, however, does not identify whether minority ethnic persons are first generation migrants (foreign-born) or belong to later generations (UK-born).

According to the 2011 census, the figures for Area A show a high concentration of Asian or British-Asian population in the area, many of them of Pakistani origin. In a report released by the borough council that Area A falls under, the two major ethnic groups other than White British were identified as Somali and Pakistani. This report also states that while 53% of the borough's population are Christians, Islam is the second most popular faith followed by 8% of the population. Thus, while Area A is majority-white, it houses a considerable population of Pakistani origin.

According to the 2011 census, the largest ethnic group in Area B was Asian: Indian or British Indian. The other major ethnic groups in Area B were: Asian Sri Lankan, Asian Nepalese, Asian Tamil, and White Polish. White British and Black British people were reported to be 7.1% and 3.0%. of the local population respectively. In terms of religion, Hindus made up 47.4% of the population followed by 27.2% Christians and 12.0% Muslims. Thus, it is evident that Area B has a very large concentration of Indian or British Indian population.

It becomes clear that while Area A, where Noor's Hair & Beauty is located, houses a sizeable Pakistani community alongside other ethnic minority communities, Area B that houses Anita's Hair & Beauty is more monocultural in terms of its concentration of the Indian community. It is no surprise, then, that in academic literature, Area A has been recognised for its 'celebratory multicultural identity' alongside finding mention in works on gentrification. Area B, on the other hand, has been referred to more categorically as a 'South Asian neighbourhood'.

Demographic statistics are rendered meaningful through observations of everyday life of the local area. Specifically, the high street is the space where urban multiculture or the ethnic and cultural diversity of an area are made visible.

The first time I came out of an underground station and ambled down Cinnamon Road, where Noor's salon stands, I thought to myself, 'What a multicultural street!' Not only were there people from myriad ethnic and cultural backgrounds on the street rubbing shoulders with each other but also a smorgasbord of rich smells and sounds that hit my senses. Noor's salon is situated on a part of the street that is evidently more South Asian – dotted with Indian, Pakistani and Afghan eateries interspersed with a mosque and a community centre for Muslims, a gurudwara, grocery stores and *halal* butchers. On the other side, besides the big supermarkets, there are indoor markets populated by Caribbean groceries, eateries, haberdasheries and various other small shops. These indoor markets also house fancy pubs and restaurants that middle-class white youngsters make a beeline for.

In comparison, Bayleaf Road, where Anita's salon sits, struck me as presenting a more exclusively Indian atmosphere on my first visit. The most prominent building is a Hindu temple that shares the street with a church and a mosque. The multi-million-pound temple that took many years to build draws attention for its scale and architecture. The sprawling temple consisting of intricately carved walls and domes bookends what is unmistakably a Hindu-Gujarati area, representative of Hindu South Asian culture. Alongside sweet shops selling Gujarati savouries and sweets, colourful shops display mannequins dressed in Indian clothes that change with the season – reflecting Indian Hindu festivals. Half-way along the street, Gujarat makes way for Daman and Diu evidenced by shops selling produce from this tiny Indian Union Territory as well as from Portugal. Men stand on the street in groups, chewing tobacco and chatting with each other. In posters attached to lamp posts in this part of the street, the local council warns people against the 'anti-social act' of 'paan spitting', i.e. staining the street red with the juice spat out after chewing on betel. Signboards of tailoring shops announce the latest designs of ladies' blouses to go with saris. Rows of women's nighties, blouses and kurtis on sale are displayed on the street. One can also spot the usual travel agents and money-wiring services typical of neighbourhoods populated by migrants. But what lends this street a uniquely Hindu character are the tiny makeshift kiosks selling idols of Ganesh and Buddha, amulets, hair clips, jewellery, mehendi (henna) cones, incense sticks and earthern lamps, resembling street markets in India. The local council also puts up decorative lights on the street in the run-up to the Hindu festival of Diwali. Bayleaf Road also has several Sri Lankan and South Indian Street food shops serving vegetarian food, numerous shops selling fresh produce from India and a second

Hindu temple for Tamil devotees. On looking carefully, one can spot a *halal* butchers separated from the Hindu temple by a row of houses.

The two salons, as their names suggest, provide both hairdressing and beauty services. This is typical of South Asian beauty salons, which act as one-stop shops for women for all their needs related to body and hair. From hairdressing through to pampering treatments such as massages and grooming services like body hair removal, the beauticians in these salons are trained to provide a full range of services.

3.7.3. Anita's Hair & Beauty

Flanked by shops selling idols of Hindu deities and clothing for women on Bayleaf Road, one can spot a large signboard for Anita's Hair & Beauty. The signboard points to a narrow alleyway that contains tiny shops selling spices and jewellery and a tailor stitching blouses for saris. At the end of the alley there is a small door that opens into Anita's Hair & Beauty. The signboard of the salon is disproportionately large compared to the other signboards precisely because the salon is hard to locate and easy to miss. It is owned and managed by Anita (38), who came to the United Kingdom from Nepal in 2000. Trained in graphic design and social work, Anita used to work for an NGO in Nepal. She migrated to the UK as a dependant of her husband who had enrolled for a master's degree in London. After failing to find work corresponding to her professional qualification and working in several low-paid customer service jobs, Anita opened her own beauty salon in 2018. She had earlier worked in her sister-in-law's beauty salon in Nepal and had experience providing home-based services to her Nepali neighbours in London.

Patronised mainly by recent migrants from India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, many of them working-class, Anita's Hair & Beauty offers hair and beauty services at affordable prices. For example, when I started fieldwork there in 2021, one could get eyebrow threading done for £2.50 compared to £5 at Superdrug. Anita also ran a couple of schemes to attract customers – every new customer was offered a loyalty card to collect stamps after eyebrow threading so that they could get the sixth threading for free. On Tuesdays, 'senior citizens' (women over 60) could get their hair coloured for £9.50 instead of the regular price of £12 if they brought their own hair colour. Both these schemes, however, were discontinued when Brexit led to an increase in the price of beauty products used in the salon.

Anita's Hair & Beauty is quite small and cramped. A totem of a lemon and seven green chillies hangs by a thread at its entrance. The salon consists of a low-ceilinged room with three salon chairs and four small decorative mirrors glued to the wall and embellished with plastic roses from Ikea. A light blue wallpaper stuck on haphazardly creates crooked lines on the walls. [Towards the end of my fieldwork, after coming back from a trip to Nepal, Anita replaced the blue wallpaper with white paint and decorated the white walls with posters of natural and historic attractions in Nepal.] Not receiving any natural light, the room is flooded with white light from eight fluorescent tubes attached to the ceiling. The wash basin is placed right next to the entrance of the salon. Near the entrance, there are two benches for customers to wait on, doubling up as storage units for salon products. There are a few other shelves in the room stacked with salon products, mainly hair colours. A small wooden temple affixed to the wall houses tiny figurines of Hindu deities. A small radio next to the temple plays Bollywood music and the local news from time to time.

The salon does not have a separate reception area or a private cubicle for massages. One corner of the room is partitioned off with curtains where a customer can lie down on a massage bed for a private treatment such as massage, facial or body hair waxing. There is also a small annexe to the room partitioned off with a curtain with another massage bed, a microwave and a tiny refrigerator – this is where the beauticians have lunch and take a break when they are tired. There is a toilet outside the salon shared by all the shops in the alleyway.

The beauticians, including Anita, wear a uniform – black trousers with black shirts that have Anita's Hair & Beauty embroidered in pink on the back, along with a black apron with pockets to store salon essentials. Despite the lack of space, the salon is always clean and organised. At any given time, Anita has two or three beauticians working full or part time with her in the salon. During my fieldwork, these beauticians were women from Gujarat, Goa and Daman & Diu – first generation migrants who either owned their own beauty salons in India or had worked in beauty salons before. With one exception, during this period Anita did not hire any apprentices or women who were not already experienced and efficient in beauty work.

Given that Anita's Hair & Beauty is an affordable salon that primarily caters to working-class clients, two kinds of affective atmospheres can be identified at the salon. During quieter periods, the atmosphere is jovial. Beauticians take time to chat, crack jokes with each other as well as with clients,

share food and sing along to the songs on the radio. The lack of privacy in the salon is substituted by a communal atmosphere of female sociality. Anita's quick wit and sense of humour mean there is never a dull moment. Beauticians give time and personalised attention to their clients, often listening to their life stories. The attention is both personal and communal at the same time – Anita has her eyes and ears everywhere and given the small size of the premises, is able to chat with all the clients simultaneously. At times like these, the salon becomes a space of intimate sociality.

There is, however, a palpable shift in the atmosphere when the salon gets busy – often *extremely* busy - with anywhere between four to eight women waiting for their turn while there are only two to three beauty workers present in the salon. The overcrowded room acts more as a beauty shop than an intimate salon space, with beauticians dividing their time between clients – doing a quick facial on client A while client B waits for her hair dye to set, then washing client B's hair while the face pack on client A's face is left to dry. It becomes a place where a client can buy beauty services and when they come out, they will have got value for their money, but not pampering or a chance to relax. Beauticians might still ask perfunctory questions about clients' lives and clients might want to share details, but the interactions are brief, even somewhat mechanical, as beauticians have their eyes on the clock and on the queue in the waiting area. On such busy days, typically coinciding with weekends and Hindu festivals, each beautician might see up to forty clients in a day.

The ethnographic field, then, is not fixed and stable but ever-changing, and the researcher thus needs to be aware of its temporality as well as spatiality.

3.7.4. Noor's Hair & Beauty

Surrounded by celebrated South Asian restaurants on Cinnamon Road stands Noor's Hair & Beauty. The façade of the salon is simple, with a white board giving the salon's name in red paint. On entering, the client walks into a medium-sized room that serves as the reception, the waiting area and the 'business' area of the salon. On one side there is a reception desk and two sofas for customers. On the other side are two salon chairs facing large mirrors on the wall. The walls, covered in off-white floral wallpaper, are embellished with framed certificates announcing the myriad professional qualifications Noor has earned in hair and beauty. A few framed Islamic calligraphies – verses from the Quran - also adorn the room. A hardbound copy of the Quran is kept behind the reception at Noor's Hair & Beauty. A big glass shelf is neatly stacked with branded beauty products

that can also be purchased for use at home. A door in the main salon area opens on to a narrow passage that leads to a kitchenette. Between the main room and the kitchenette is a small room with a massage bed where more private services such as body hair removal, facials and massages are provided. Besides the massage bed, this room also has machines for laser hair removal. The kitchenette has a fridge, a microwave and kitchen cupboards. Attached to the kitchenette is a small toilet for the staff to use. Overall, Noor's Hair & Beauty is spacious.

Noor (48) came to the UK from Pakistan in 2005 on a family visa, shortly after her marriage to a man who worked here. Having learned beauty work from an aunt in Pakistan, she found a job in a beauty salon within days after arriving her arrival in London. After working in a couple of salons, she started providing beauty services at home as she had small children to look after. But when her children were slightly older and she had saved up enough money, Noor opened her own beauty salon in 2014. An ambitious and hardworking woman, she is always drawing up plans to expand her business. At the salon, she presents a pleasing and cheerful personality. She dresses modestly which includes wearing long-sleeved dresses that cover her forearms paired with slacks to cover her legs. Her hair is coloured blonde and tied up neatly in a bun and she wears bright red lipstick. There is no uniform for the salon staff at Noor's Hair & Beauty but there is an emphasis on looking modest and presentable which means that the beauticians usually wear long tunics and slacks. A majority of the clients of the salon are Muslim women of Pakistani origin from different class backgrounds. Some of the regulars are white, middle-class women, and occasionally, a few black women come to the salon.

At any one time, Noor employs two or more assistants who work part-time in her salon. The turnover rate of Noor's assistant beauticians is usually quite high. Instead of hiring trained beauticians, Noor usually recruits first-generation South Asian migrant women known to her and trains them in beauty work. Some of these assistants are not particularly interested in building a career in beauty, so their commitment to the profession is low.

At her salon, one can witness Noor play her roles as a business owner and beautician along with her role as a mother. The inside room that is used for waxing and facials also doubles up as a resting place for Noor's youngest son who is seven. Noor feeds him and helps him freshen up there after picking him up from school in the afternoon. Between returning from school and going to religious

class in the evening, he plays or reads in that room, leaving it only when it is required for a customer. Noor also uses that room for offering namaz [prayers]. When there are no customers, Noor sends her assistants home and sits behind the reception talking to her relatives in Pakistan, munching on a salad or sipping a milkshake. Noor's salon does not get as busy as Anita's because clients know that Noor is the main beautician in the salon and that the other beauticians merely assist her. So, they either come by appointment or come back later if they see that Noor is busy with a client.

The pricing at Noor's Hair & Beauty might appear arbitrary, even deceptive, to the untrained eye. The prices mentioned in the salon's rate card are the starting price for any service but the final price that the customer pays is calculated by Noor based on how much time and effort was invested by her. For example, if the rate card mentions £10 for waxing full arms, that is what somebody with the least hairy arms will have to pay. The price might go up to £20 for extremely hairy arms. When Noor anticipates that a certain customer will bargain, she quotes a higher price and then offers a 'discount' on it.

Thus, Noor's Hair & Beauty and Anita's Hair & Beauty are both salons owned by first-generation migrant women from South Asia who came to the UK on account of their husbands. After gaining experience providing home-based beauty work and working in other salons, they opened their own salons in London. Both of them hire other first-generation migrant women as assistant beauticians. Run in a small space in London, Anita's Hair & Beauty caters primarily to working-class migrants. Noor's Hair & beauty, on the other hand, is more spacious and attracts Muslim women from Pakistan alongside other clients, from different class backgrounds. As evidenced in expensive salon furniture and the display of professional qualifications on the walls, Noor's salon might appear to be more upmarket than Anita's, but Anita is more professional in the way she runs her salon. She hires beauticians who are already trained and wear uniform at work. Noor, on the other hand, hires migrant women in need of work and trains them at work. The salons represent different types of neighbourhood South Asian beauty salon in London.

Chapter 4 - Girlfriend Intimacy: How Beauty Creates Intimacy in the South Asian Beauty Salon

4.1. Introduction

This thesis focuses on the space of the beauty salon. In this chapter, I aim to unpack what the 'beauty' preceding the salon stands for. What meanings and potential for intimacy are to be found in South Asian women's pursuit of beauty? What intimate practices emerge from a quest for beauty in the beauty salon and who do they bind together?

Beauty is a fraught topic in feminist scholarship. It has been theorised in often contradictory ways - from a tool of women's oppression to a pathway to women's liberation. This theorisation is polarised along 'well-worn fault lines' of women's agency versus cultural influence (Elias, Gill & Scharff, 2017: 9). Early feminists regarded the beauty industry, which included beauty salons, as 'hegemonic power brokers engaged in highly unequal and manipulative relationships with women' (Scanlon, 2007: 317). The Foucauldian approach espoused by a number of feminist scholars considered beauty as a disciplinary technology that produces femininity (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1994). Sandra Lee Bartky (1988), for example, described women's investment in beauty as a product of female self-surveillance arising from the male gaze.

Maxine Leeds Craig (2006) has, however, critiqued such scholarship as describing a racially unmarked, heterosexual woman, of unspecified class. She writes that feminist scholarship remains 'caught between two competing analyses of beauty' - of beauty as a structure of oppression and beauty as a pleasurable instrument of female agency - because it has been asking the wrong questions about beauty (Craig, 2006: 159). In her research looking at black women's experiences of beauty parlours in the 1960s USA, Craig (2002) argues that women's experiences of beauty are formed at the intersections of white beauty standards, notions of black middle-class respectability, and black pride as well as female sociality and leisure. Thus, she describes beauty as a 'guilty pleasure' for black women, calling for an analysis of beauty contingent on women's social location (2006: 165). Detecting 'manifest signs of pleasure' in beauty, Rita Felski has also accused feminist scholars of turning beauty into 'irrefutable evidence of female pain' (2006: 273). She wonders if

feminist thought, always so insistent on female suffering, could ever make room for an affirmation, however conditional, of the value of beauty.

Scholarship that views beauty as pleasure has emerged largely from considering the experiences of racialised women. Such scholarship also does the work of illustrating how feminist discourses of beauty are inherently classed and raced. By taking an 'anti-beauty position', feminist discourse further excludes black and working-class women who have often been denied access to beauty (Holliday & Taylor, 2006: 184). An anti-beauty position denies racialised and working-class women the opportunity to make themselves recognisable within the norms of beauty (Tate, 2016).

There has, then, been a 'return to beauty' in feminist studies that recentres agency, pleasure and intersectionality (Coleman & Figueroa, 2010: 358). Contemporary debates about beauty 'highlight the importance of understanding the politics of beauty from the perspective of local places and specific communities situated within historical contexts and broader economies' (Craig, 2021: 7). In Claire Colebrook's words, the renewed interest in beauty is 'not so much moral – is beauty good or bad for women? – but pragmatic: how is beauty defined, deployed, defended, subordinated, marketed or manipulated, and how do these tactics intersect with gender and value' (Colebrook, 2006: 132).

Continuing in the same vein, this chapter presents an analysis of the beauty practices of migrant South Asian women in London's beauty salons. It attends to the calls in recent feminist scholarship to address beauty as an empirical question (Figueroa & Rivers-Moore, 2013). Instead of locating oppression or agency in beauty a priori, such an approach must attend to intersectionality in determining what beauty means to women. I argue that in order to interpret intimate practices within the beauty salon, we must first understand the emotions that beauty is capable of evoking among first-generation South Asian women. I show how these women experience beauty as pleasure, pain, desire, leisure and hope, that orients them towards other women, especially the beautician. I illustrate in this chapter how each service interaction in the beauty salon is complex, such that it cannot be grasped without considering the client's background, including their migration trajectory, how often they go to a beauty salon and what services they choose. I aim to present a complex examination of beauty and the ensuing potential for intimacy through an intersectional analysis of gender with race, class and migration.

To understand the sociality engendered by beauty, I use the lens of girlfriendship (Winch, 2013). Alison Winch (2013) came up with this term to denote a strategic form of female sociality through which girlfriends enable feminine normativity. Girlfriendship highlights how women's investment in normative practices of beauty may be monitored by girlfriends, validated by girlfriends or enjoyed with girlfriends. Building on Winch's work, girlfriendship has been conceptualised as a project of gendered disciplining that works through the affective pleasures of belonging (Kanai, 2017). Girlfriendship ensures that women are nudged into investing in beauty practices by other women rather than an abstract male gaze, creating homosocial intimacy in the process. While Winch used this concept to study popular culture, I borrow it as a lens to look at the creation of intimacy in the South Asian beauty salon.

4.2. The pleasure of beauty and the promise of girlfriendship

In this section, I present three vignettes that illustrate how migrant women from different class backgrounds experience beauty and how it creates intimacy between them and the beauticians in the beauty salon.

4.2.1. Beauty as escape

A middle-aged Tamil woman from Sri Lanka, Radhika, arrived at Anita's Hair & Beauty bedecked in gold jewellery. She was speaking to someone on the phone. She handed over her mobile phone to Anita, saying she would like Anita to speak with her daughter, a regular client. Anita put the phone on speaker mode and a chaotic conversation ensued. Radhika's daughter explained on the phone that her mother wanted to get her eyebrows done and her hair cut. After hanging up, Radhika made it clear that she had come to Anita's Hair & Beauty on her daughter's recommendation. She also took the opportunity to mention how the salon next door was offering lower prices, but she still chose to come to Anita. 'You do nicely, okay?' she said, a plea for reassurance as much as a command. 'You do nicely, then I come to you always. I don't go anywhere else.'

When Anita started waxing her eyebrows, Radhika's body jolted with the plucking of the waxing strip. She could not stop repeating how scared she was of the pain, which is why she rarely went to a beauty salon. 'Akka, in beauty, no pain no gain', Anita resorted to her trademark adage, referring to Radhika as an elder sister in Tamil. She called beautician Ritu over to stretch the skin around

Radhika's eyebrows to lessen the pain. Like a child afraid of needles, Radhika clutched Ritu's hand tightly, making it difficult for them to work. 'Akka, how you take out the baby?' said Anita. 'Compared to baby this is nothing!' When one of her eyebrows was done, Anita quipped, 'Ok akka, one baby out'. Everyone laughed.

After both her eyebrows were done, Radhika implored Anita again, 'You do it nicely, okay?' She meant the haircut to come. As Anita ran her scissors through Radhika's hair, Radhika lamented about hair loss, attributing it to stress. 'Why you stressed akka? Your daughter not married?' Anita hit the nail on the head. 'No,' Radhika let out an embarrassed chuckle, 'she doesn't want to marry'. Whilst admiring in the mirror how the haircut and blow-dry were slowly transforming her, she said that it had occurred to her to get a haircut the night before. Given her bad experiences in the past, she was scared of beauty salons. But she was glad to have taken up her daughter's suggestion to try Anita's salon. Once everything was done, Radhika took a long look at herself in the mirror. Something had shifted within her. She was no longer the scared and suspicious person who walked in through the door of the salon an hour ago. Feeling chirpy and chatty, she turned to us - a Gujarati client waiting her turn and me - to express how offended she felt when people older than she is, called her 'aunty', implying that the haircut made her look younger. 'I slap you if you call me "aunty",' she said in mock anger, slapping my thigh and laughing. I laughed along. 'Why should you care about what other people say?' the Gujarati woman remarked, showing us her own grey hair, which she refused to colour.

'I am so happy today,' Radhika continued, thanking everybody present in the salon, even those of us who had had no part to play in her transformation. 'Thank you, thank you, I come here again. Always cooking, cleaning, housework,' she frowned, expressing a lot more through her emotive face than through her patchwork English sentences. 'My husband not doing anything, only eating,' she said. 'Everybody's husband only eating,' the Gujarati woman responded. 'It's not easy, always cooking, cleaning, looking after children,' Radhika continued. 'Do you not work outside?' the other woman asked. Radhika answered that she was a childminder. She looked after other people's children in her house. 'My husband looking at other women and saying, "what a nice sari!" But never to me,' she complained. 'Today your husband will get a nice surprise,' said the Gujarati woman. Finally, after pouring out her heart and giving another round of thanks, Radhika prepared to leave. 'I will bring

you chocolate, okay?' she said to Anita. 'No, akka, don't make me fat,' Anita said. 'Okay then, I bring you vadai,' Radhika replied, promising a savoury fried snack, and left.

This vignette captures a range of emotions experienced in a single encounter at the beauty salon. There is fear and pain -- the price to pay for perfectly pruned and shaped eyebrows, whether it is a sharp thread or a layer of hot wax that rips the tiny eyebrow hair off your skin. Pain that may not be comparable to, and yet evokes, the ubiquitous metaphor of childbirth, the exemplar source of excruciating pain that every woman is expected to be familiar with. No pain, no gain, as Anita says. Finally, there is pleasure that pain gives way to. The pleasure that comes with looking at your reflection in the mirror, admiring the youthful look bestowed on your face by a nice haircut and those flawless arches that are your eyebrows. This pleasure, no matter how momentary, overshadows the frustration of the daily grind of cooking, cleaning, cooking, cleaning that goes on endlessly. It makes you feel grateful to the salon worker who gave you the gift of beauty and must be repaid in food. Ironically, you will still not escape cooking, but you might enjoy cooking for the beautician who granted you respite from cooking for your husband who does nothing but eat.

Radhika was a working-class client who only occasionally went to a beauty salon. For her, even a service such as eyebrow threading, part of routine grooming for many others, brought aesthetic pleasure as it was not something that she did regularly. This vignette also shows how beauty makes one sociable towards other women present in the salon. Radhika placed her trust in Anita to handle her with care and mitigate her pain, shared her worries about her unmarried daughter, and then felt so grateful that she wanted to bring Anita homecooked food on top of paying for the service. She openly shared details about her unhelpful and unappreciative husband, assuming that other women would understand her woes and sympathise with her, as indeed they did. Radhika went home feeling not just young and beautiful but also having enjoyed female sociality and a break from daily routine. Thus, beauty creates girlfriendship between women in the beauty salon.

4.2.2. Beauty as fantasy

A young Indian woman, Nisha, came to Noor's salon with her friend. Having driven from a borough an hour and a half away from the salon, Nisha had booked an appointment for hair colour and cut. 'I missed you so much,' she proclaimed to Noor upon entering the salon. She was in a jolly mood, treating this session at the salon as a 'girls' day out', a little time-off from childcare duty, as her

husband was working from home that afternoon. She showed Noor a picture of Hollywood actress Jennifer Aniston on her phone, requesting straight, golden-blonde hair like her. Noor studied the picture carefully and began working on Nisha's hair, starting with bleaching to strip the hair of its natural colour so that it could absorb the dye. Nisha and her friend seemed to be enjoying their time at the salon, sharing stories and laughter with Noor. Most of their conversations revolved around raising children. Five hours later, Nisha's hair was still not done, and I left for home. The following day, when I was back in the salon, Noor showed me a long and emotional text message she had received from Nisha. When Nisha had gone home, her daughter had complimented her saying that she looked like a 'little mumma', a younger version of her mother. Nisha expressed her heartfelt gratitude to Noor for transforming how she looked and making her feel great about herself.

Nisha was a middle-class Indian woman who was easily able to afford the material resources needed to style her hair like a Hollywood actress (car to drive to the salon and over £100 charges for cut and colour) but as the mother of a toddler, she was hard pressed for time. As she did not do paid work, a trip to the beauty salon with her friend once in a few months was her idea of taking time out for herself. Aside from leisure time enjoyed with her friend, she derived pleasure from beauty because of its ability to evoke desire, fantasy and imagination. During my fieldwork, it was commonplace for women who came to the salon to produce a picture on their phone, usually of an actor or a celebrity, to show what kind of hairstyle they wanted. Invoking these images had the affective power to make them believe, however momentarily, that they could transform themselves into the objects of their desire. From Princess Diana to Jennifer Aniston, however, these images were inevitably of Euro-American women who could be classified as 'thin, blonde and beautiful', understood as the paradigm of normative white femininity (Deliovsky, 2008:55). In wanting to look like white celebrities, racialised migrant women confirm the global circulation of white beauty standards. However, transnational circulation of beauty ideals produces a complex web of meanings. Post migration, racialised women find themselves in a context where becoming beautiful is simultaneously an impossibility because beauty is defined as whiteness and a possibility that promises to disguise the signs of racial difference (Cheng, 2000). An aspiration to 'white beauty standards' becomes intertwined with aspirations to class mobility and/or urban metropolitan identity (Elias *et al.*, 2017). The desire for straight, blonde hair, therefore, can be read as a desire to blend in and to appear urban

and middle-class. Beauty thus can be mobilised as a gendered and racialised symbolic resource that produces pleasure (Craig, 2006).

4.2.3. Beauty as upward mobility

At Anita's Hair & Beauty, Mary had just started to work on the hair of a middle-aged Nepali woman, Asha, who wanted her hair coloured red. On hearing this, Mary decided to call Anita, the owner of the salon, who was acquainted with Asha, as both were from Nepal. 'She wants red colour for her hair, what should I do?' asked Mary, amused and baffled in equal measure. Anita demanded to speak with Asha on the phone and persuaded her to go for golden blonde instead. Red was too bold a colour, she said, and if Asha did not like it once it was done, it would be a waste of both time and money. Half-heartedly, Asha agreed. She kept interrogating Mary on what skincare products she used as Mary did not have any wrinkles and appeared younger than her years.

Asha told me that she was a single mother who worked as a housekeeper in a private school. Her husband died of cancer and her only daughter was pursuing a Law degree. She had heard about Anita's salon from her Nepali friends and decided to try it out as she was going to Nepal three days later. When I asked her how often she went to a beauty salon, she said, 'My financial condition is not so nice. So I cannot go very often. I am here today because I am going to Nepal'. We chatted about her job as a housekeeper, how she managed without knowing much English and how she longed to go back to Nepal. She was also curious about my research and asked me questions. I made her a cup of tea and offered her a slice of the cake that I had brought to share with the beauticians. Mary and Asha also got along like a house on fire, with most of their conversation centred on the hardships of immigrant life in London.

At the wash basin, Mary massaged Asha's hair and then washed it gently with lukewarm water. Hair washing is the kind of therapeutic service that Mark Paterson (2009: 766) describes as impressing itself on the body through a form of touching 'irreducible to mere skin contact'. Paterson terms this kind of touch as 'haptic' in that it goes beyond skin contact to include internally felt sensations which can create a deeply affective phenomenon between bodies. While moving the hose over Asha's head, Mary brought up the topic of buying a house in London. Asha laughed. As someone who was

struggling to survive -- to make enough to pay rent and buy groceries -- she said that she did not dare to dream of owning a house in the city. 'That's everyone's story, we're all merely getting by in London,' Mary comforted her. 'But if you and your partner are both working, then it's possible to think about buying a house,' she added. 'Ok then, I will look for a partner now!' Asha giggled, eliciting laughter from Mary.

As Mary proceeded to blow dry her hair after washing out the dye, damp strands of hair coming to life with the powerful gush of hot air, Asha grew exhilarated to see the results. Her hair was soft, shiny and golden. 'I can find a boyfriend with this hair,' she blushed, admiring her reflection in the mirror. Asha was so happy that she offered presents to both Mary and me: thermos flasks that students habitually left behind in the classroom and that she brought home. 'These students come from rich families, they pay 40k a year, they don't worry about retrieving such little things,' she said, justifying her gifts of 'lost and found' items. After spending a productive afternoon at the salon, Asha left to buy a jacket that her mother had requested she bring from London. 'Next time, I want red,' she expressed before leaving.

For somebody like Asha, who could not afford to go to a beauty salon regularly, a trip to the beauty salon to colour her hair before a flight to Nepal was as essential as a shopping expedition to buy gifts for her family members. Both were intended as indicators that she was doing well in London, no matter how hard her life actually was in the city. The exhibition and celebration of the migrant body takes on a salient role on migrants' return to their country of origin (Parrini et al., 2007). The body is taken as material evidence of a good life in the country of destination (Ong and Braun, 2016). It also denotes a capacity to consume that indicates status for migrants. Thus, investment in beauty allows migrant women to denote higher status or simply allows them to hide the struggle that their life entails.

The interview excerpt below provides some more information to understand the context in which migrant, working-class South Asian women access beauty. It reinforces the importance of beauty treatments for migrant women before traveling to their country of origin.

> Anita: Clients get a permanent hair straightening done before going to India because they know that their family and friends will not have straight hair and that will make them look unique.

Nandita: Do they also feel like it will signify to others that they are earning well in the UK?

Anita: Yeah, it is also a bit of a show-off. Women even get an expensive facial done before going to India. They go for the most expensive facial and ask us, "how long will the glow remain on our faces"? When they are here, they never get a facial done. They do it just before they are about to leave for India. If they don't have the time for a permanent straightening, they will get a temporary straightening done. If their flight is tomorrow morning, then they will come for a hair straightening today. If their flight is in the evening, they will come in the morning. But they will get their hair straightened. I tell them, "Yes, yes, you are going to go in the plane, so your hair will still be straight by the time you arrive". What have we got to lose by their last-minute decisions? We give them what they want.

Anita also explained to me that for many uneducated, rural women who either did not do paid work in India or worked for free in family businesses or as daily-wage manual labourers, migration to the UK facilitated their participation in the labour force, giving them more disposable income. The fact that they spent their day off from work at the beauty salon demonstrated their newfound ability to spend on something other than daily necessities. Many confided in Anita that they had never been to a beauty salon before migrating to England.

Investment in beauty is inextricably tied to how the body is seen as a marker of social class (Bourdieu, 1986). Displaying femininity is never a given for working-class women, especially those who are involved in forms of physical labour that hinder feminine appearance (Skeggs, 2001). Working-class women therefore view their bodies and invest in them as a form of cultural capital. In his study on the biopolitics of beauty in Brazil, Alvaro Jarrín (2017) noted that working-class participants often told him that ugliness was a signifier of poverty while beauty a form of social capital that could be bought and mobilised for personal and professional gains. Most of his interviewees understood beauty as central to their social worth and opportunities for social mobility.

Beauty thus acquires different meanings for women according to the context and must be analysed bearing in mind the specificities of those contexts. For a working-class woman involved in home-based childminding work, beauty may provide a momentary escape from daily routine and housework that goes unnoticed and unappreciated. For a middle-class migrant mother, beauty may signify leisure and fantasy. For a working-class migrant woman visiting family 'back home', beauty

may denote social status. All of them, however, may enjoy their time in the beauty salon, sharing sociality with other clients and forming an intimate bond with the beautician serving them. They may share details of their personal lives with the beautician, as one would with a friend, and express their gratitude for the aesthetic transformation that they experience – through homecooked food, a text message or an ingenious present. Thus, beauty is either enjoyed in the company of girlfriends or enables sociality with other women present in the salon.

4.3. The gaze of the expert girlfriend

In the last vignette in the previous section, the beauticians also played a role in determining what was class and age appropriate for the client. Both Mary and Anita dissuaded Asha who was an elderly, working-class woman, from colouring her hair red. The beautician, thus, takes on the role of an expert girlfriend who can bestow the gift of beauty but can also regulate it.

The 'expert girlfriend' helps women negotiate the abundance of choice – the right diet, the right haircut – by situating herself in the sphere of intimacy and using the trope of relatability (Winch, 2013: 34). Although Alison Winch applies this framework to self-help authors who claim to help other women in achieving ideal femininity, it is also applicable to beauticians in how they position themselves with respect to their clients. An expert girlfriend criticises while also identifying with other women on the basis of shared female experience. Thus, girlfriends together produce a 'rhetoric of sisterhood' premised on an 'us' that is defined in opposition to 'them' -- the men (Winch, 2011: 360). Girlfriends turn to each other to figure out how to perform normative femininity.

Winch (2013: 8) argues that 'the girlfriend gaze' works through a language of intimacy and friendship, acting as a system of mutual governance which makes women strive for beauty ideals in order to gain other women's approval instead of that of men. The girlfriend gaze renders the male gaze benign, passing on the role for monitoring the performance of appropriate femininity to a woman's girlfriends. Drawing on their lived experiences as women, girlfriends 'cultivate a site of feminine intimacy and offer woman-to-woman tried-and-tested common sense' (Winch, 2011: 361). In the beauty salon the girlfriend gaze extends to all parts of the female body, reflected in beauticians admonishing their clients for growing out body hair or not taking good care of the hair on their head.

Once, I observed Anita remark to a child whose mother's chin hairs she was threading: 'Was your mummy competing with your daddy?' This cryptic remark, which would have made little sense to a child, was a jibe aimed at her mother who had come to the salon with overgrown chin hair.

Another day, the strong smell of chemicals used for hair straightening filled up the narrow passageway leading from the main road to Anita's Hair & Beauty. Even before I had entered, I could tell that someone was getting their hair straightened. It was a slightly built Indian woman, Pinki, who smiled a lot but did not talk much. Mary had been working on her hair for five hours, going through round after round of applying straightening cream followed by pressing the hair with a hot iron for the bonds in the hair to break from application of extreme heat and chemicals. As she pressed strands of Pinki's long hair with a hot iron, a sharp and acrid smell released into the air along with the fumes. Pinki had been sitting on the chair patiently, without taking a break to eat or drink. Her hair was apparently very dry. Mary was concerned about the quality of her hair and the effect that permanent straightening was going to have on it. 'Her hair is so dry', she complained to salon owner Anita in Hindi, although she usually spoke English in the salon, implying that the comment was made for Anita alone. She reiterated this comment every few minutes, visibly flustered. Pinki now smiled apologetically. Aware that Mary was struggling with the long dry hair, Anita lent a hand. They began to press strands of Pinki's hair with two irons simultaneously. Pinki winced with pain at her hair being pulled in two directions at the same time. Now Anita too began to remark on the dryness of her hair. 'Do you oil your hair, darling?' she asked. Pinki shook her head, 'no', sheepishly. Anita listed a whole range of products and services to soften her hair. She recommended regular oiling, applying hair masks and keratin treatment. Anita and Mary made no effort to hide the hard work it was to press Pinki's long and dry hair into submission. 'I hope you learnt a lesson today', said Anita to Pinki when the process was finally over, referring to the additional pain that Pinki had to endure because her hair was dry. Thus, a client who paid nearly £100 was chastised for the dryness of her hair, implying that she alone was responsible for the pain suffered during the process of hair straightening. Aside from applying the girlfriend gaze that admonished the client for not taking care of her hair, expert girlfriends also recommended more products and services to her while she was already undergoing one treatment. As part of girlfriend culture, women's autonomy is reframed as the ability to buy beauty products and services (Winch, 2012).

The mutual disciplining of female bodies was also reflected through Noor's and Anita's obsession with weight loss. They not only followed strict diets and exercise regimes themselves, but also made a point of discussing these with clients – recounting their own experiences at length, asking whether the client had noticed any difference in their weight since their last visit, and encouraging the 'over-weight' ones by reference to their own achievements in this respect. Once, closing in on a Pakistani customer's face with a pair of scissors, Noor said to her, 'Mashallah, your face is so cute, if only you would lose some weight!' The woman, no plumper than the next South Asian middle-aged woman, murmured inchoate words of guilt and apology. This was only the second time she had come to Noor's salon. Noor advised her to replace rice and bread with lettuce leaves. By the end of her haircut, the customer was exasperated by Noor's weight loss advice. 'Ab bas bhi karo!' [Do let it drop, now!], she pleaded. But Noor did not let it drop. As soon as the woman left, she turned to me and remarked, 'How is she so fat? And she doesn't even care!'

Notably, these kinds of comments – on excess weight or body hair – were never made to white clients in both the salons. The girlfriend gaze was only applied to South Asian clients, 'our women' who supposedly needed the gaze of the expert girlfriend to be disciplined into appropriate femininity through brazen critique. This gaze, whether welcome or not, constituted an intimate practice on the part of the beautician.

4.4. Locating girlfriendship in the pain of beauty

4.4.1. Disclosing intimacy

In many treatments that are part of the contemporary beauty regime, especially body hair removal, the path to pleasure is studded with pain. As Anita loved to say to her clients: 'In beauty, darling, no pain, no gain'. The first time I heard her say this was when a young woman was getting the hair in her nostrils waxed. Frightened, the woman clutched at the beautician's shirt as she applied hot wax in her nostrils carefully with the tip of an earbud. She was made to wait for a few minutes in what seemed to me a comical posture – her head tilted back with two earbuds sticking out of her nose. Then, when it was time to strip the wax out, the woman invoked God's name loudly, drawing attention to herself, leading to an exchange of glances and chuckles from other customers. Not long after, I saw another young woman, this time at Noor's Hair & Beauty, getting her nostrils waxed in preparation for a job interview. I wondered what made women undergo painful procedures that

seemed unnecessary, even harmful, as I had always known nostril hairs to act as filters against dust and allergens.

One of the possible explanations for why women put up with pain in pursuit of beauty is that pain symbolises the 'work' that they put into self-presentation. Performing labour to be beautiful inserts one into consumer society, thereby differentiating oneself from other women who do not put any effort into being beautiful (Tate, 2009). As we saw earlier, to be included in girlfriendship, women must demonstrate a commitment to transformation by being discerning consumers (Winch, 2013). Girlfriendship, then, is closely tied to the neoliberal idea of 'aesthetic entrepreneurship', a popular discourse that encourages women to work constantly on their bodies – with agency and creativity – such that the project of maintaining and beautifying their bodies appears free of societal constraints and pressures (Gill, 2007; Elias *et al.*, 2017). Perhaps as Anita said, indeed: no pain, no gain.

The pain of aesthetic entrepreneurship is gendered in the beauty salon: when a hairless body comes to be the benchmark of normative femininity, the pain of hair removal gets constructed as a uniquely female experience. Such an essentialised understanding of pain then becomes the ground for cultivating girlfriendship. Women express solidarity with each other because they know what it is like to endure the pain of body hair removal. Anita often commiserated with her clients saying, 'What all we must take care of as women!' While acknowledging the pain of hair removal and the gendered nature of this pain, this point of view does not challenge the convention. In fact, it reinforces the understanding of a hairless body as feminine. This is a reminder that girlfriendship is primarily a project of gendered disciplining through intimacy. As well as instructing her clients that some pain must be tolerated in pursuit of beauty, Anita proclaimed her own good luck in that she 'naturally' had little or no body hair. Displaying her hair free arms and legs, she told clients that she had never needed to wax in her life. She had an interesting relationship with pain. One time, I saw her agree to eyebrow threading, a once-in-a-blue-moon event, brought about only by another salon worker's pestering her about the errant hair in her eyebrows (an instance of the girlfriend gaze!). It was an extraordinary sight to see Anita kicking in the air, flailing her arms and swearing profusely in reaction to the pain. The irony did not escape her either. 'I love weeding out other people's hair,' she said, 'but I am very sensitive to pain myself'.

By contrast, Noor often told her clients how much she had suffered because of body hair when she was young, to the extent that it had made her life miserable. She also related this to me in an interview:

> When I got married, I had such lovely hair [on the head]. So long and thick. But I didn't enjoy it because at the time I also had facial hair. I was so worried. I had so much hair that it looked like a beard. Because my skin was very fair, they were very visible. My cousins used to make fun of me, calling me 'our brother with a beard'. You know how much I used to cry at night? I used to pray to Allah to take away my facial hair. I used to think "I want to go to London to get it treated". Because there is no treatment for this in Pakistan. That's what I used to wish for ... and now look, I have my own laser machine!

Anita showing off her hair-free skin or Noor boasting about the laser machine that mitigated her own facial-hair problems: both make it appear common sense that women must not have any body hair on visible as well not generally visible parts of their bodies.

Girlfriendship also serves another practical purpose in the beauty salon: by inducting both the beautician and the client into an intimate bond, it mitigates the shame that the client might feel in exposing her body hair to the beautician. What could have been a shameful or embarrassing experience for the client – exposing her body while the beautician remains clothed -- is remade into a collective experience implicitly known to all women, engendering intimacy. When it comes to pubic hair removal, especially, beauticians must first help clients overcome their shyness, which they usually do by resorting to declarations of gendered sameness. Noor and Anita often told clients, 'we all have the same body parts' or 'we are all same down there' to make them feel comfortable. They also discussed their own hair removal practices. For the client, the vulnerability of exposing her private parts and dependency on the beautician are thus reframed as an intimate experience. For the beautician, girlfriendship becomes a way of managing the awkward intimacy of being exposed to a stranger's private body parts.

It also illustrates a peculiar form of 'disclosing intimacy' that takes place between women in the beauty salon (Jamieson, 2005: 189). Self-disclosure of personal information is believed to be the essence of intimacy in relationships (Cadner,1994: 215). Negative self-disclosure, or sharing information about unpleasant experiences in one's memory, has been identified as more intimate

than positive self-disclosure (Howell & Conway, 1990). While scholars of intimacy have discussed self-disclosure in the context of couple relationships, it also emerges as an intimate practice between the beautician and the client. The intimate practice of talking about body hair and the feelings of shame and embarrassment caused by them generates intimacy between women in the beauty salon.

4.4.2. Labouring femininity

Aside from labouring on one's body, another kind of 'labour' is frequently invoked in the beauty salon. A Pakistani woman brought her Somali friend to Noor's Hair & Beauty.[4] She wanted to introduce her to threading and waxing of facial hair and trusted Noor to do a good job of it. When Noor started waxing the woman's face, she moaned with pain. Never having done it before, she found hair removal agonising. 'Never again,' she said, upsetting Noor. 'Does she have kids?' Noor asked the Pakistani woman in Urdu. 'Yes, she has three children, mashallah,' the woman replied. 'Darling,' Noor immediately turned to the Somali woman, 'How you deal with that pain?' 'That pain is different,' the woman answered. 'Don't lie to me, I have three children, I know that pain,' Noor insisted, 'You say "never again" and then in one year you forget and have another child'.

Noor drew an analogy between labour pain and the pain of hair removal. She also implied that with both, a woman says 'never again' when she is the midst of pain but forgets it in no time such that she is soon ready to go through it again. What is also implicit in this statement is that the rewards of both childbirth and hair removal must be so great as to make the woman forget about the pain. So, if a woman wishes to enjoy the outcome, she must be prepared to withstand the pain. I would hear this analogy every time a woman complained of pain from hair removal at both Noor's Hair & Beauty and Anita's Hair & Beauty. As Anita said to the Tamil woman mentioned at the beginning of this chapter who was terrified of eyebrow threading, 'Akka (sister), how you take out the baby? Compared to baby this is nothing!' On another occasion, she said the same thing to a young Indian woman who was moaning with pain. Embarrassed, the woman immediately clarified that she was not yet married.

[4] This vignette is part of a longer, tense exchange discussed in a different context in Chapter 8.

The efficacy of the analogy between the pain of beauty and that of childbirth rests on certain assumptions. The most important is that a woman, by virtue of her sex, understands labour pain. Labour pain is invoked as something that must be intelligible to a woman as an authentic personal experience. She must either have experienced it already or expect to experience it in the future. Either way, it is unbecoming to complain of the minor pain of hair removal given the colossal pain of labour that she has undergone/will undergo. There is also a collective whisper hidden somewhere in this analogy: a warning that women's lives are full of pain. Plus, a glorification of the kind of woman who puts up with pain without complaint. Pain is normatively understood to be part of ideal womanhood. This can be seen in some scientific/medical as well as popular discourses constructing vaginal birthing as a superior form of birthing by projecting maternal selflessness onto the pain (Malacrida & Boulton, 2012). Thus, pain comes to be seen as constitutive of femininity, of hairless wives and selfless mothers.

Girls are inducted into this kind of femininity at an early age. Once, two teenage schoolgirls came to Anita's Hair & Beauty for facial hair removal. The two girls – twin sisters -- were accompanied by their mother and aunt. 'We have come to support them, as hair removal is so painful,' they said. Through this show of support, the two adult women were not only establishing hair removal as a rite of passage to womanhood but also setting up the beauty salon as a site of female sociality by accompanying the girls while they underwent facial hair removal.

Whether as warning or as virtue, pain creates an intimate girlfriendship. This intimate network is not only predicated on normative femininity but also reinforces it. It produces a community of women who remove unwanted hair from their bodies and want/have babies. What happens in the beauty salon can also be understood as gendered disciplining -- women must be free of body hair even if it causes pain -- that works through the affective pleasures of belonging to a community that shares the common experience of pain in pursuit of ideal womanhood. Women can be admitted into this affective community by adhering to normative femininity, irrespective of their differences. Girlfriendship works to construct the pain that a woman has to endure during hair removal as no less 'natural' or inevitable than the pain experienced during vaginal childbirth. Both epitomise the female experience.

While, in theory, any woman can become part of girlfriendship, pain tolerance is often used as a boundary to differentiate South Asian and black women from white women. Not once did I witness the beauticians invoke childbirth with white women who complained of pain during body hair removal. One day when I arrived at Noor's salon, I could tell from the groans that a novice waxer was in the massage room with Noor. I could also tell that the client was getting a Brazilian wax (pubic hair removal) from the way she muttered 'fucking hell' under her breath every few seconds. Noor came out of the massage room, drenched in sweat. After catching a breath and informing me that the client was getting a Brazilian wax for the first time, she went back in. I heard her chat about all and sundry with the client in order to distract her from the pain but no questions resembling, 'Don't you have children?' A little later, a middle-aged white woman walked out the door.

This reflects not only the care that is shown towards white clients (discussed in Chapter 8) but also the way their tolerance for pain is understood and accepted as low. When a young woman who had come to Anita's Hair & Beauty reacted to eyebrow threading with excessive moans, Anita recommended waxing to her. When the woman hesitated about the efficacy of waxing eyebrows, Anita produced what she thought was a convincing argument: white women prefer to get their eyebrows waxed because they are too sensitive to pain, just like the client.

South Asian women's reactions to pain, on the other hand, are monitored by beauticians and even by fellow clients who may be complete strangers. This collective monitoring is facilitated by the limited space of the neighbourhood South Asian salon, meaning that clients are within earshot of each other, with everyone privy to all the goings-on. Even when receiving a private treatment such as a facial, a massage or pubic hair waxing at Anita's Hair & Beauty, one is separated from others only by a thin curtain, creating a homosocial intimate sphere rather than one where individual privacy and autonomy are valued.

On one occasion, a woman in her 40s, Kamna, was sitting in the salon, sharing pictures of the rugs she had bought for cheap from Southhall market. The pictures passed from hand to hand, with women asking on which day of the week they could find the street market in operation. Soon, Kamna was joined by her friend. Inside, separated by a curtain, a woman was getting her armpits waxed. We could hear not only the woman's loud moans but also Anita admonishing her for how long she had grown her armpit hair before deciding to get a wax. Beautician Rekha, while looking at the

pictures of the rugs, pitched in with her advice that Anita should cut the client's armpit hair off with scissors instead of directly waxing them, if they were too long. 'What all must a woman do!' Anita's voice resounded from the other side of the curtain. When the client finally came out of the curtain area, Kamna pointed at her and said to her friend, 'Oh, so *she* is the one who was doing the "'aaah" and "ooohs"'. Just in case the woman had not already been embarrassed enough by the public discussion of her long armpit hair, she was now singled out as someone who failed to take the pain of hair removal in her stride. While the woman nervously smoothed her shirt and made to leave, Kamna quickly moved on to chiding her friend for not colouring her grey hair.

4.5. Fraught Intimacy

I have shown in this chapter how girlfriendship is a project of gendered disciplining through intimacy. Women who do not voluntarily and happily offer themselves to be part of this project are often excluded from intimacy. They may even experience the beauty salon as an oppressive space where their bodies are constantly scrutinised. That was the case of the woman who, sick of Noor's weight-loss advice, pleaded with her to stop. I did not see her at the salon again during my fieldwork. Those who complain too much about pain are also excluded from this intimate community as ideal women are supposed to put up with pain without complaint. This was evidenced in the case of the black woman whose low pain tolerance was seen as amusing given she had birthed three children. In both the salons, women who were too sensitive to pain were deemed one of the most annoying category of clients while women who took it on the chin were truly appreciated as clients. I also encountered women who desired girlfriendship but on their own terms and did not welcome unsolicited advice on services and products just because femininity and beauty are always deemed elusive and needing more effort. Thus, a project of intimacy based on investment in normative femininity always risks excluding some women. Women can also be included in this intimate community on some occasions and excluded on others.

4.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that beauty creates affective value for first-generation, racialised, predominantly working-class migrant women. They experience beauty as a source of pleasure, fantasy and imagination. They also experience it as a marker of status and success as a migrant, denoting social mobility in the UK as well as displaying this mobility to their family and friends when

they visit their country of origin. Women also experience beauty as leisure, one of the few elements in their lives that can create a spatio-temporal dimension where their bodies are in focus and in receipt of pampering. The positive emotions resulting from investment in beauty practices orient the client towards the beautician and other women present in the salon, binding them in sociality and intimacy. This intimacy forms the basis of the neighbourhood South Asian beauty salon as a diasporic space.

Whether one views investment in beauty practices as empowering or as oppressive for women, it does become evident that female sociality in the beauty salon performs the work of enforcing normative femininity more often than not. Beauty salons are 'disciplinary sites' where women's bodies are 'poked and prodded, shaved and sprayed, manipulated into some degree of submission to a set of ideas that, among other things, defines beauty as always elusive, never fully available, always demanding further manipulation, more attention' (Scanlon, 2007: 318). However, it is the security offered by belonging to normative femininity that makes the beauty salon a site of female relating (Winch, 2011). I have demonstrated that in the neighbourhood South Asian beauty salon, seeking beauty is not an individual pursuit but one that is circumscribed by sociality. Women's concerns and anxieties about their bodies, ironically, can also bring them together. This is most evident in the declarations of gendered sameness during body hair removal practices in the two salons. Thus, 'disclosing intimacy' wherein women talk about private bodily matters such as body hair to each other emerges as an intimate practice in the beauty salon.

The feeling that one is like other women, that one is part of a group, is an important element in the business of beauty. It is the collective pursuit of normative femininity through beauty that leads to sociality and intimacy in the beauty salon. Away from the presence of the male gaze, women in the beauty salon both discipline and support each other. To this end, girlfriendship emerges as a productive framework to understand intimacy in the beauty salon. The beautician takes on the role of an expert girlfriend who applies the girlfriend gaze to discipline other women into appropriate femininity. Analysing the girlfriend gaze as a practice of building intimacy with the client shows how intimacy may not always be welcome or be experienced positively. Through drawing a parallel between the pain of beauty and the pain of childbirth, investment in beauty is made out to be an essential female experience and also a marker of boundary between white women and South Asian women.

What is characteristic of girlfriendship is that it is not about bringing women together to defy patriarchal systems (Winch, 2011). Aside from not posing a challenge to normative ideas of femininity, the sociality achieved through beauty practices in the salon is also steeped in a culture of consumerism. In this regard, it is instructive to read how Laleh Khalili describes the pleasure practices of Palestinian women in refugee camps enjoying leisure time on women-only beaches in Beirut:

> I can see how such pleasures are consumerist, although I do not know how to find a space outside of consumerism today if the consumption even of '15-cent nail polish' traps us in the circuits of exchange. My concern is that I, we, write in scholarly journals and books, adjudicating the lives of others, measuring them against impossibly heroic indices of struggle, exhorting them towards grand utopias, demanding an austerity in commitment we ourselves do not observe. Life is many things: capitulation or struggle, anger or fear or laughter, silence and work and yes capitalist leisure (Khalili, 2016: 596).

Investment in beauty in the South Asian beauty salon cannot be disentangled from a culture of consumerism and normative femininity. However, at a time when intimacy is becoming increasingly commercialised, experiencing girlfriendship in the beauty salon inserts working-class South Asian women into the consumer society. It enables them to express their right to beauty through access to disposable income and leisure time. Thus, consuming beauty treatments in the company of other women engenders intimacy and generates pleasure in the beauty salon.

Chapter 5 - Gender Intimacy: Solidarity and Support in the Beauty Salon

5.1. Introduction

Noor's Hair & Beauty and Anita's Hair & Beauty are women's beauty salons. Gender segregation in the two salons was strictly enforced through signs on the door that forbade men from entering. It was not, however, uncommon for a man or two drop by, having failed to notice the sign, to ask if they could get their chest waxed or eyebrows trimmed. Men also accidentally showed up in the salon with their female partner or friend who was evidently there for the first time. Both Noor and Anita reacted to the presence of men in their salons as though it was nothing short of a criminal act, shaming them for ignoring the sign, asking them to step out. Men who were familiar with the concept of gender-segregated spaces offered a quick apology and left. Others, who could not grasp the enforceability of the seemingly arbitrary rule, insisted or requested that they be serviced or allowed to wait inside whilst their female companion was being serviced only to be asked, immediately and sternly, to leave. Thus, the two beauty salons were produced as women-only spaces through signage, informal sanctions and reliance on common sense about gender-segregated spaces.

'How is your husband?' was the first question Noor asked when a new South Asian client walked into her salon. It was not an inquiry after the husband's health. 'How is your husband?' she once asked an elderly woman who was at the salon to get her hair dyed. The woman answered that he had passed away a long time ago. 'He is worth mourning only if he was good to you. If not, you should take it as Allah's will and move on,' Noor said, before quickly posing a follow-up question. 'Do your son and daughter-in-law treat you well?' This is the kind of 'women's talk' that immediately drew women into a circle of intimacy at Noor's salon. Depending on the client's willingness to share details of her personal life, the salon became a space of sharing and a place to find emotional and practical support.

In this chapter I argue that migrant women share an intimacy in the beauty salon that is based on common experiences of gender and enacted through the modalities of 'women's talk' as well as practical acts of support. The South Asian beauty salon thus emerges as a localised support system for first-generation migrant women who are geographically separated from familial and community support networks comprising sisters, friends and neighbours. The beauty salon is one of the few

places where first-generation migrant women can meet other women like them and talk about issues that concern their everyday lives.

Gender intimacy, I argue, both relies on and enables a collective articulation of resistance to gender norms, albeit still within the framework of compulsory heterosexuality. Here, resistance is conceptualised as posing a challenge to 'dominant, restrictive or constraining views of femininity, sexuality, or motherhood' (Shaw, 2001: 191). Like the intimacy engendered by the collective pursuit of beauty practices described in Chapter 4, gender intimacy also arises from sociality in the beauty salon; however, unlike the intimacy of beauty that reinforces normative femininity, the intimacy of gender leads to resisting normative feminine behaviour in so far as it makes life a little more liveable for migrant women. Such intimacy, however, is not invested in posing a collective challenge to the patriarchy or compulsory heterosexuality but in supporting each other to bring about strategic changes in the sexual division of labour to improve the lives of women in post-migratory contexts.

The space of the beauty salon plays an integral role in this limited resistance, as gendered identities are spatial. Eileen Green (1998) argues that space and place are important components in the construction of gender identities. Women who are confined to the home by domestic and caring responsibilities are more likely to construct their identities around their roles as wives and mothers (Green, 1998). In the beauty salon, women are more likely to conceive of themselves as individuals seeking leisure, rather than in relation to their family members. Thus, the space of the beauty salon becomes conducive to articulating collective resistance to gender roles in the company of other women, enabled by the intimacy and support that they provide. In this chapter, I first show how, in contrast to beauty practices that reaffirm normative femininity, leisure practices in the beauty salon produce a discourse of female agency and autonomy. Then I look at 'women's talk' or conversations that generate female bonding, and practical support as the two modalities through which the South Asian salon is produced as a space of diasporic intimacy. In the final section, I reflect upon the limitations of an intimacy based on shared experiences of gender.

5.2. Doing femininity at leisure in the beauty salon

In Chapter 4, I teased out the bonding that takes place amongst women in the beauty salon by adhering to normative standards of femininity. The way discourses of femininity are produced at Anita's Hair & Beauty and Noor's Hair & Beauty, however, are far from straightforward. Doing

'femininity' involves labouring to produce a feminine appearance as well as embodying feminine characteristics such as being caring, gentle, passive and non-assertive (Skeggs, 2001). Although the space of the beauty salon is complicit in the production and reproduction of normative feminine beauty standards and practices, it can also produce discourses that pose a challenge to norms of feminine behaviour. One of the primary ways in which this is done is by articulating the beauty salon as a site of leisure for women – which, in turn, produces a discourse of women's right to leisure.

Leisure has been considered empowering for women in scholarly literature because it allows them to resist traditional gender norms (Henderson & Gibson, 2013). Women use leisure to challenge their lack of power or to express their dissatisfaction with the roles and behaviours the society expects of them (Shaw, 2001). In order to carve out time for leisure, women must resist the societal pressure to conform to an ethic of care and of constant availability to meet others' needs (Harrington *et al.*, 1992). However, in order to fully understand the constraints on women's leisure, scholars must focus on the interconnections between social categories such as gender, race, age, ability and class (Choo & Ferree, 2010). While gender is one of the most significant determinants of women's access to leisure, their experiences and constraints cannot be explained by gender alone (Watson & Scraton, 2013).

Migrant women's access to leisure is mediated by a combination of factors such as gender, race, religion and class. A spatial analysis of the leisure practices of migrants might help us to think intersectionally in relation to leisure, as public spaces of leisure are often racialised, gendered and classed (Watson & Ratna, 2011). For example, in a study conducted with South Asian Muslim women in Leeds on leisure, it was found that the participants preferred to attend an aerobics class that catered specifically to South Asian women over visits to public spaces such as the city centre (Scraton & Watson, 1998). Thus, rather than studying leisure spaces as sites where leisure always already takes place, a spatial analysis of leisure recognises that leisure is experienced through a continuous process of negotiation and contestation with space depending on one's social location (Watson & Ratna, 2011; Wagner & Peters, 2014). The beauty salon is one space where working-class women from South Asia can experience leisure, although they might need a little nudge from the salon owner, as illustrated in the vignette that follows.

A middle-aged Gujarati woman came to Anita's Hair & Beauty carrying with her a pack of hair colour. Instead of using her name, Anita greeted her as 'Riya's mother', with a hint of sarcasm in her voice. Then she quickly informed me that the last time *Riya's mother* came to the beauty salon was on the occasion of Riya's wedding. She was usually too busy to come to the beauty salon. In keeping with her reputation, Riya's mother announced that she was going to get the hair colour applied and then go home. She did not have the time to wait for forty minutes for the colour to dry and then be washed off by a beautician. She even set a timer on her phone so that she would know when to wash off the dye at home. 'Why are you getting all worked up? Sit here, we will wash off your hair and send you home,' Anita said. 'For forty minutes! No way! I have so much to do at home,' Riya's mother answered, keeping her eyes peeled for the clock on the wall. As beautician Harsha was applying colour to her hair, Riya's mother received a call on her mobile phone that she answered in a frazzled voice. 'See, she has been summoned home already,' remarked Anita. Riya's mother explained that her son had called to say that he was home. She had to go and cook for him.

Anita promptly clarified, for my benefit, that the son she was referring to was not a child but an adult – a man with a wife and a kid. 'Can he not cook for himself? If not, let him eat bread and butter,' she said to Riya's mother, followed by a proper dressing down. 'You are always running about. Sometimes one must live for oneself. We, South Asian women, we want to do everything ourselves. The husband is on his mobile phone and the wife keeps running about,' said Anita, mimicking a man sitting cross-legged and operating his phone. She then mentioned that even though she did not worry about her husband's and children's meals, they still managed to feed themselves. 'Really, occasionally, you must take time out for yourself. Live for yourself,' she insisted. Riya's mother smiled and gave in. It is as though something dawned on her in that very moment. Not only did she wait for forty minutes for the dye to dry; she also asked for a pedicure. Getting her pedicure, she looked happy and relaxed. 'Anita, you taught me how to live today,' she gave Anita a hi-five. Thus, Anita managed to change the client's mind, first by indirectly expressing her disapproval of how the client could not see beyond her role as a mother by sarcastically referring to her as 'Riya's mother' and then by confronting her about it directly.

The woman spent a long time in the salon, chatting with me and another client who was getting a manicure. I had introduced myself as a researcher and told her about my research. To my surprise, towards the end of her pedicure, she asked me, 'Did you teach this to Anita *ji*?' 'What?' I asked,

puzzled. 'This . . . that one must also live for oneself.' 'No, this is something I have learnt from Anita *ji* as well,' I laughed. That she must think that such a thought could only originate with me was a moment of reflection for me about my place in the beauty salon. Perhaps as an academic with social and cultural capital in a setting that was primarily working-class, I was seen as the one bringing in ideas that were 'modern' and unconventional. However, the idea of resisting the pressures of heteropatriarchy, to pause serving husbands and children, even if momentarily, originated in the salon itself. These minor acts of resistance assumed significance in the light of previous research that found that South Asian migrants living in the UK display more traditional gender roles, characterised by a clear division of labour between a male breadwinner and a female homemaker, compared to white British and other minority immigrant groups (Wang & Coulter, 2019). Analysing how first- and second-generation South Asian women in the US understand their gendered experience within familial and community contexts, Gita Mehrotra (2016) also claims that their identity as a woman pivots around heterosexual marriage. When South Asian women become mothers, they are socialised to perform motherhood in a way that neglects their selfhood (Sangha, 2014). The discourse of leisure in the beauty salon, then, marks a break in this narrative, allowing women to focus on their needs as individuals instead of their roles as wives and mothers.

In a space of leisure, when women have time to talk to each other in the absence of men, the very devices that produce and reproduce normative feminine appearance can also be used to pose a challenge to norms of feminine behaviour. The site where gender identity is fashioned and practised also offers the possibility for women to resist and rethink normative feminine identity.

Take hair, for example. In South Asia, the hair on women's heads is subject to patriarchal control as it symbolises their honour and femininity (Ray Chaudhuri, 2017). In Hinduism, while married women are expected to have long hair, widows are expected to shave off their hair to avoid attracting men (*ibid.*). Ritu, who worked as a part-time beautician at Anita's Hair & Beauty, provided an example of such patriarchal control of women's hair. She unravelled her bun one day to show me her hip-length hair. She had to tie her long hair in a bun. If she tied it in a ponytail, it swung from one side of her back to the other uncomfortably while she worked. She wanted to cut it very short but did not have her husband's permission to do so. In the same breath, she recounted to me how as a little girl she had gone to a beauty salon and got her hair cut short. When she returned home,

her mother had punished her by beating her with a broom. Since then, she had never dared to cut her hair short again.

By contrast with this kind of family control over women's hair, the beauty salon emerged as a space where Anita and Noor often reminded clients that they did not need anybody's 'permission' to style their own hair. Whether Hindu or Muslim, whenever women expressed a desire to cut, colour or style their hair and then dithered, worrying about what their husbands or other family members might say, Anita and Noor articulated an alternative discourse that reminded them of their ownership of their bodies. Not all women were persuaded of course. But what matters is the articulation of female agency and autonomy, when such ways of thinking as well as choice-making are often unavailable to women. For instance, in a study conducted with women in three South Asian countries -- Bangladesh, India and Nepal – on who in their families has the final say on making decisions regarding their health care, between 48 and 73% of the women reported that the decisions were made by other family members without consulting them (Senarath *et al.,* 2009). For women who come from cultural contexts where they often do not get to make decisions concerning their own bodies, the opportunity to think about bodily autonomy in the beauty salon may seem almost revolutionary.

The subject of hair always caused animated discussions in the salon, between beauticians and clients, and at times between clients themselves. Once, when asked by a beautician at Anita's Hair & Beauty why she did not colour her hair, since there was a lot of grey showing, a client answered that her husband did not like it when she coloured her hair. 'It's my hair. I don't ask my husband what I should do with it. I don't tell him what to do with his beard either,' another client promptly pitched in, leading to a discussion between clients on whether husband's preferences ought to be taken into account. Hair is a source of 'endless metaphors and symbolic meanings' which can denote a woman's age, marital status and membership to a social or religious group (Barak-Brandes & Kama, 2018: 7). A woman's rebellion or conformity to socio-cultural norms can also manifest in her hair. Hair is thus a perfect topic for feminist analysis because of its potential to be mobilised for acts of resistance and subversion (Davis, 2019). As a space where bodies are beautified and manipulated, the South Asian beauty salon thus opens up a conversation on bodily autonomy and agency by hosting competing discourses of hair styling as self-expression versus long and natural hair as a symbol of femininity.

5.3. What is women's talk?

Scholars have studied the role of leisure in facilitating and strengthening social support and friendships amongst women (Green, 1998; Henderson & Gibson, 2013). Green (1998) argues that although women spend time developing and maintaining various types of relationships, if is often within women-only contexts that opportunities arise for them to resist stereotypical gender roles. Such resistance is brought out by women sharing their experiences with each other and in so doing recognising the social construction of gender. Although women's talk has long been denigrated as idle chatter or gossip, research has found that women use leisure time with other women to challenge their lack of power (Shaw, 2001). Women-only spaces may also enable a reconstruction of gendered identities, especially by posing a challenge to what are generally considered socially acceptable behaviours (Green, 1998). Talk, intimacy and laughter are key elements in forming friendships between women (*ibid.*). The intimacy of women's talk and the sense of connection that it engenders allows women to construct collaborative ways of navigating the world (Coates, 1996).

Women in the salon talked about everything, from global events to domestic ones. In this section, however, I look at talk that generates a sense of shared female experience and bonding – expressed through conversations ranging from the exchange of laments and commiserations to practical tips. It is usually in the absence of men that such talk arises between women. The beauty salon functions not only as a location in which women from similar backgrounds come together, but also as a space in which 'essentialised female truths can be uttered, explored, and validated' (Scanlon 2007: 319). Women's talk draws on common experiences and understandings of the world based on gender and thrives in the all-women's space of the beauty salon. There is something about the 'physicality of the salon encounter' that prompts clients to disclose personal information (McCann & Myers, 2023: 112). This physicality is closely linked with how intimate areas of women's bodies - such as hair, face, arms, legs and inner thighs --which are rarely touched by anyone except intimate partners are touched by beauticians in the salon (*ibid.*).

No topic was considered 'off limits' in conversations at both the salons. Some clients shared details about their lives without needing to be invited, giving the lowdown on everything that had happened in their lives since their last visit to the salon, while others opened up in response to questions that encouraged and elicited self-disclosure such as the one mentioned in the beginning of this chapter –

'Is your husband good to you?' This kind of confessional talk might also take on added significance in the case of first-generation migrant women who are isolated from networks of family and friends in their countries of origin. I encountered several women in the salons who had migrated to the UK and moved in with their husbands' families within weeks or months of their marriage. From how they missed their families to the troubles of sharing a small house with their in-laws or other co-ethnics: the salon was a safe place to voice their feelings and concerns about such matters.

Part-time beautician Bharti, who had worked in beauty salons in Gujarat and in London, compared her experiences in the two locations:

> Nandita: They (clients) talk about what's in their heart?
>
> Bharti: Yeah (lowers voice) …See, you know what the thing is here, people don't meet each other very often. They are not very social. They are all busy at work. In India, we sit outside our houses and chat with our neighbours. Here even neighbours don't talk to each other. So, people come here to talk their hearts out. Whatever it is. If they know that you are willing to talk and are taking interest, they will tell you their entire life story.
>
> Nandita: This didn't happen in India?
>
> Bharti: It did happen but less frequently. After they came to your salon once or twice, if they liked you, then you got to hear their story. Here, you get to hear their story on their first visit.

The content of the conversations between women, and how these conversations might lead to strategic resistance of gender norms, is specific to the post-migratory context. To go back to what Anita said: 'We, South Asian women, we want to do everything ourselves. The husband is on his mobile phone and the wife keeps running about'. Such an articulation becomes possible when 'we', in comparison to other women, become recognisable for our traditional gender norms. Such a comparison, then, enables the imagination of a different, more gender equal world. Below is an excerpt from a group interview with beauticians at Anita's Hair & Beauty that elucidates how migration to the UK leads to rethinking of gender norms and roles:

Anita: In my opinion, if I was still in Nepal or she [Rupali] was in India, then our husbands would not have supported us the way they do now.

Rupali: Here, husband and wife are equal. Look, it is not just about work. Women work outside the home in India too. But there, the husband dominates the wife. When the wife works outside, the parents-in-law complain about her to their son that she does not do enough at home. Neighbours also gossip about her. But the man does not do anything to help his wife because he is taught to be that way. But here, the husband even looks after the child. When he goes to work, he sees women co-workers. He realizes that they work just as hard as him. Then he begins to understand his wife. That his wife also works hard both at home and outside. His mind opens up when he talks to different kinds of people. The other thing is…not living with the in-laws also has its own benefits.

Nandita: That the husband becomes more of an equal partner?

Anita: Yes, he becomes an equal partner.

Rupali: Both of them work, then both of them go home, then they share the chores in the house.

Anita: Yes, that's what I like about living here.

While salon owner Anita was clear that men and women had more equitable gender roles in the UK, beautician Rupali tried to analyse the transition through the husband's eyes. According to her, post migratory circumstances, such as the absence of his parents and the opportunity to mix with people from different cultures, created a favourable environment for rethinking gender roles among men. For many a woman, however, the beauty salon was where this reflection sparked off.

During my fieldwork, one of the favourite topics of discussion amongst women at Anita's Hair & Beauty was how to make husbands contribute to housework. Such discussions were often led by Anita, spurred by her unapologetic admission that when Anita's husband did not have a job, he took care of household chores and their children while she devoted her time to the salon. Even when he worked, he continued to be the primary caregiver for their children. She made sure to talk about it without invoking her 'luck' but drawing on an ideology of dividing tasks equally. When some women

rebuked her for spending more time in the salon than with her children, she impressed upon them that she had not made the children by herself; their father had equal responsibility towards them. Some others remarked on how lucky she was to have found a husband who held the fort at home without complaint. But Anita never missed an opportunity to tell women to give up the urge to do all household chores and care work by themselves, which she understood to be a peculiarly South Asian trait.

At Noor's salon, conversations often revolved around women's experiences of violence in marriage. Noor encouraged women to leave abusive and alcoholic husbands and to become financially independent. She frequently drew on a religious discourse vis-à-vis the rights of women in Islam. It is well documented that South Asian women do not speak about domestic violence to people outside the family due to notions of honour and shame (Anitha, 2008; Gilbert et al., 2004). Even when they feel trapped in difficult relationships, they generally do not seek help from a GP or use mental health services for reasons of family honour, the need for secrecy and fear of discovery (Anitha, 2008). Given this background, I found that women often shared stories of difficult marriages and sought support in the safety of the beauty salon. It was not, however, an unusual discovery in view of the programmes that have started to emerge in different parts of the world to train and utilise salon workers to address family violence, especially with marginalised groups. These programmes are based on the insight that beauticians have close contact with community members due to the intimate nature of beauty work (see McCann & Myers, 2023). The touch-and-talk aspects of salon work, combined with frequent and lengthy visits, make the beauty salon a likely place for women to disclose experiences of intimate partner violence.

Even though division of labour did not often come up as a topic of conversation between women at Noor's Hair & Beauty, Noor told me that she was the primary earner in her family. Her husband, who held temporary part-time jobs, cooked, cleaned and looked after their youngest child. Unlike Anita, however, Noor did not make an example of this in front of other women. This may be because amongst South Asian women, Pakistani and Bangladeshi migrants are often found to exhibit more traditional gender role attitudes (Wang, 2019). These traditional views are thought to be influenced by a more patriarchal home country culture as well as adherence to relatively conservative strands of religion (Heath *et al.*, 2013). Given that traditional gender roles are also directly linked to lower

rates of labour force participation, however, Noor led by example in how women could become financially independent through self-employment.

In her research with white beauticians in UK's beauty salons, Paula Black (2004) noted that beauticians are trained to be mindful about not getting drawn into discussions of controversial topics. The avoidance of sensitive and personal topics such as religion, sex and politics is one of the basic rules of professional ethics in beauty work. Bahar, a part-time beautician at Noor's salon who had recently completed a National Vocational Qualification in Beauty, confirmed this claim: she told me that she was taught in her beauty school never to get involved in women's personal problems. She said that they were instructed to listen if needed but never get involved. More broadly, in service sector jobs in the West, one of the markers of professionalism is maintaining boundaries between personal and professional by avoiding over-identification with the client or managing such 'excess' familiarity if it does nonetheless occur (Malin, 2000). Professionalisation also refers to standardisation of workers and worker identities (Lerum, 2004). In the South Asian service sector, more particularly, professionalism refers to workers' ability to speak, dress, look, act and behave like corporate professionals in the West (Ray, 2024). This notion of professionalism is not adhered to in Noor's and Anita's salons. In both these salons, beauticians' and clients' shared identity and experiences are as important as their qualification and expertise, if not more so. Identifying with the beautician in terms of ethnicity and gendered experiences, but also ways of looking, speaking and behaving is what makes the client trust her in the first place. In the same vein, standardisation of worker identities is not something sought after by clients in the two salons either. They develop individual relationships with beauticians depending on their levels of trust and comfort with them.

Given this context, it was hardly surprising that the regular clients of the two salons I interviewed described the beauticians as 'like family to me' or 'one of my best friends'. A client I interviewed after the second coronavirus lockdown at Noor's salon said that she had come to Noor to unburden her heart. 'If it was just about beauty, I would do it at home myself,' she said. 'I come here to feel light and happy.' Between her arrival and departure, she talked non-stop, discussing everything from her personal life to national politics in the UK and in Pakistan. Once her beauty treatments were done, she phoned a nearby restaurant to order some 'chicken dynamite', a spicy fried chicken, that she and Noor would relish together.

From the client's point of view, treating the beautician as a friend also means that she is seen as an equal rather than a worker who may be deemed inferior in status to oneself. This could be one of the reasons why even during the pandemic, clients who came to the salon did not deem the beautician's touch to be contagious or risky despite the fact that the beautician came into close contact with many different women in the course of a day. This was markedly different from the attitude people displayed towards high-status professionals such as healthcare workers and low-status professionals such as domestic workers, as reported from South Asia. The power differential between employers and domestic workers resulted in the moral burden of preventing contagion and disinfecting their workspace being placed squarely on the workers who were seen as potentially infectious (Satyogi, 2021). Doctors and nurses, on the other hand, were stigmatised due to their association with infected bodies (Bhanot *et al.*, 2021). As clients in the beauty salon saw the beauticians more as their friends rather than intimate workers, this may have led to the non-stigmatisation of their touch.

As part of friendship, although beauticians rarely reciprocated self-disclosure as regards their own personal lives, they did form 'close and caring relationships' with clients that could be described as 'commercial friendship' (Price & Arnould, 1999: 44). Commercial friendships, like other friendships, involve affection, intimacy, social support, loyalty and reciprocal gift-giving (*ibid.*). As part of these friendships, beauticians performed the role of attentive and sympathetic listeners, often dispensing well-meaning advice. This clearly went against professional training that asks them not to get involved in the lives of clients. However, a sense of community took precedence over 'professionalism' in the neighbourhood South Asian beauty salon. Sharing of advice and practical tips took place between fellow beauticians as well as between beauticians and clients. Clients exchanged advice with each other as well, but given the small size of the two salons, private conversations between clients, excluding the beauticians, were rare. From sharing tips on making husbands contribute to housework to seeking advice when trapped in abusive marriages, women bonded over conversations in the salon that draw on gendered sameness.

Below, I present three examples that represent the range and nature of 'women's talk' at the salons:

At Anita's Hair & Beauty, beautician Mary complained that she had asked her husband to make some *daal* (lentil soup) and he had made too much, without adding the mustard seeds that add taste to it.

She would have done better to make it herself. In response, beautician Ritu revealed that her husband did not contribute to housework. She added apologetically that although he did not know how to cook, he did the grocery shopping on weekends and folded the laundry when it was done. She was trying to make him understand that all the other women's husbands – especially Anita's – did housework. He had told her that it was fine for her to say such things in the bedroom, but she must never ask him to contribute to housework in front of his mother and sisters. Hearing this, Mary emphatically told Ritu that if her husband did not mend his ways, Ritu would eventually get frustrated. It might seem fine now, but once she had children – and she was speaking from the experience of having raised her kids single-handedly – having no time to look at herself in the mirror or to get proper sleep would embitter and frustrate Ritu. The solution was to train her husband to contribute to housework now.

As Bushra, a client in her late 30s, settled down on the salon chair for her eyebrows to be threaded at Noor's Hair & Beauty, she said to Noor, 'Now that you are my friend, shall I ask you a personal question?' Noor asked her to go ahead. 'Had I stayed with that man I would have had money but no respect. Did I do the right thing by leaving him?' The manner in which this question was posed, without offering any background information, showed that Noor has prior knowledge of the events in Bushra's life. 'Even animals have all they need, but what sets us apart from animals is that we need respect. If there is no respect in a relationship, one should not stay in it,' said Noor, validating Bushra's decision to separate from her husband. Bushra took this opportunity to fondly declare Noor her friend, her *jaan*, a term of endearment for a loved one. Bushra then asked Noor if she had taken a course in beauty and how much it had cost. Noor told her that she had several NVQs (National Vocational Qualification) in Hair and Beauty. Bushra revealed that she had also enrolled on a vocational course, having realised that she could not depend on her parents financially for long. Noor received this news with a great deal of enthusiasm. She said that she would like to see Bushra stand on her own two feet. This made Bushra declare that Noor was a true friend to her.

Part-time beautician Sheetal was washing a client, Huma's, hair. While shampooing Huma's hair at the wash basin, she asked what Huma does for a living. Huma answered that she worked as a teaching Assistant. Sheetal asked if there was a NVQ for that and what level was needed to qualify as a teaching assistant. Huma answered that you need to qualify at Level 3 of the Teaching Assistant National Vocational Qualification. Sheetal told her that she had a Level 2 in Health and Social Care.

She had considered working as a teaching assistant but decided that it was going to be too difficult for her as one had to be alert all the time when working with children. It was not a relaxed job and was made harder by children's speaking different languages. Her own daughter spoke in a mix of Gujarati, Hindi and English, at times resorting to Gujarati with her class teacher from Sri Lanka. Sheetal found understanding kids to be the most difficult aspect of a teaching assistant's job. Huma agreed with her, adding that students in her class spoke Arabic and Polish besides all the other languages she mentioned. Huma, in turn, asked Sheetal if she had learnt beauty work in India. Sheetal went on to say that, in addition to beauty work, she had also worked in a care home in London, looking after older people suffering from dementia. Huma asked if Sheetal had found care work difficult, and Sheetal replied that it was not so difficult if you chose a care home close to where you lived. Even though she had been required to bathe and dress old people who would then forget that they had been bathed and dressed, she still preferred care work to other forms of work.

In the first vignette, besides commiserating on their shared misfortunes as women, Mary also advised newly married Ritu on a practical way to cope – to train her husband to contribute to housework. In the second vignette, Noor encouraged Bushra to become financially independent after supporting her decision to leave her abusive husband. In the third vignette, Sheetal and Huma shared information about the difficulties involved in and qualifications needed for certain kinds of work in the UK. Thus, instead of reinforcing the traditional roles of South Asian women as wives and mothers, women's talk in the beauty salon enables them to think of themselves as workers and leisure-seekers. By exchanging insights from lived experiences as well as useful information, migrant women support each other in their desire to participate in paid employment and make time for leisure.

As part of staking a claim to leisure while challenging narrow definitions of socially acceptable behaviour, women also participated in sexual banter in the beauty salon. This kind of banter was mostly initiated by the beauticians. Whilst scholars have noted that sexual banter is an integral part of male working-class cultures, the few studies that look at it in women's workplaces are primarily studies of sex work (Attardo, 2010; Sanders, 2004). One thing that struck me right from my first day of fieldwork at Anita's Hair & Beauty was how much Anita relied on sexual humour involving double entendre to lighten the atmosphere at the salon. It was remarkable not only because of the sexually conservative image of South Asian women but also because we know rather little about

'working-class humour' among women workers, let alone South Asian women workers. In one of the few studies on this topic, Sandya Hewamanne (2012) has analysed Sri Lankan garment workers' engagement in sexual banter in the streets and described it as empowering. She claims that by discouraging such banter, Western-funded NGOs collude in 'the capitalist global scheme to produce docile working-class women who follow rules of respectability and, hence, ensure an ideal assembly line workforce' (Hewamanne, 2012: 354). She looks at how working-class women transgress male and middle-class notions of respectability through sexual banter during leisure time. It is acknowledged that sexual banter among co-workers can lead to worker camaraderie (Lerum, 2004). Sexual banter thrives in work environments that are relatively 'flat' in terms of social and economic hierarchy and where workers are required to perform physical labour in close proximity with each other (Lerum, 2004). Anita's Hair & Beauty fit this description of a workplace perfectly.

An Indian woman in her 30s came to Anita's Hair & Beauty to get her eyebrows done. 'Stretch it for me,' Anita said to her, meaning that she wanted her to stretch the skin around her eyebrows with her fingers. 'I don't like to stretch,' the client answered. 'Darling, if you don't like to stretch, how will you have kids?' said Anita. The client burst into laughter. Here, laughter was produced by a shared understanding or imagination of what it meant to *stretch* and what was being *stretched*. To pick up the double meaning of Anita's statement, the client needed to be attuned to her proclivity for sexual humour. Another time, Anita was washing a client's hair, using a hose to wash off excess hair dye. The woman commented on how much Anita was shaking the hose. 'I'm shaking it for your benefit,' said Anita. 'Don't talk dirty to me!' the woman acted coy. 'What did I say wrong? I said I'm shaking it for you,' Anita reiterated, well-aware of the double entendre in her statement. In this case, it was somewhat less ambivalent, as the Hindi word '*hilana*', which literally means 'shaking', is also slang for masturbating.

The beauticians at Anita's Hair & Beauty could find the risqué in anything and everything and giggled like schoolgirls most of the time. Their humour was open to anyone who was imaginative and willing to laugh along. Sexual humour often created a cheerful atmosphere in the salon. For instance, once, a beautician checked the face pack on a woman lying on the massage bed after a facial and said, 'Her thing has dried,' meaning it was time to take the face mask off. That made Anita laugh. 'What are you saying, her thing has dried? What thing has dried?' she chided the beautician who laughed along. 'Her incomplete sentences always make me laugh,' Anita said to me. Sexual banter also enabled

beauticians to discuss their sex lives with their husbands and different methods of contraception in a joking manner. This kind of talk challenged not only gender norms but also the notion of respectable femininity. One beautician recounted to me how an elderly Gujarati client had reacted to one such ribald joke, 'Your faces are so innocent, and then you talk like this!'

Sexual banter was a form of 'women's talk' that created intimacy in the beauty salon, both between beauticians and between clients and beauticians. A women-only space affords women the chance to 'let their hair down' and 'behave badly' i.e., outside the confines of 'normal, acceptable, womanly behaviour' (Green, 1998: 181). Hewamanne (2012: 371) even points to the 'liberatory potential' of sexual banter because it not only goes against societal expectations of women's behaviour but also reflects women's agency.

In Anita's salon, sexual banter led to homosocial conviviality that challenged norms of respectable feminine behaviour. At the same time, this kind of banter was sanctioned within the framework of respectable heterosexuality, a fact that ought not to be dismissed. During the early months of my fieldwork at Anita's Hair & Beauty, as a single woman, I had to make an effort not to seem too eager to participate in sexual banter. Anita and the other beauticians considered me to be sexually naïve on account of my unmarried status. In the latter part of my fieldwork, on acquiring 'married' status in their eyes when I registered a civil partnership with my boyfriend, I suddenly found myself included in sexual banter to the extent that jokes were often made at my expense as a supposedly newly sexually active, woman. The possibility of sex outside of heterosexual marriage was not merely unacceptable but also inconceivable, at both Anita's Hair & Beauty and Noor's Hair & Beauty.

5.4. Creating support networks

In the previous section, I highlighted how women's talk in the beauty salon generates intimacy that enables migrant women to resist traditional gender norms. When women come together and share their stories, the sense of 'me too' underpinning their gendered experiences can also lead to their helping each other in practical ways. Words of encouragement and advice in the beauty salon often extend to providing support in concrete terms. Salon owners such as Noor and Anita were in a unique position to support other women by training them in beauty work, a set of skills that made them employable in other salons or enabled them to generate income by providing home-based services. To date, the literature on home-based work among South Asian migrant women has dealt

only with garment workers sewing from home in Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities in Britain (Kabeer, 1994; Bhopal, 2014; Deen, 2023). This is not surprising given that Muslim South Asian women from Pakistan and Bangladesh have much lower rates of participation in the formal economy compared to Indian and East African Asian women (Ahmad *et al.*, 2012). Looking at British-Bangladeshi women's experiences in Tower Hamlets, Naila Kabeeer (2000) found that opting for home-based piecework rather than factory work was primarily a response to childcare needs and lack of formal qualifications.

First-generation South Asian migrants, of any religion, face housework and childcare responsibilities as well as language and qualification barriers that often prevent them from participating in the formal economy. Childcare emerged as an important concern for women in my fieldwork, owing to traditional gender roles among South Asian communities that delegate the responsibility entirely to women. While the beauticians I met at Noor's salon had grown-up children, many part-time beauticians working at Anita's Hair & Beauty had young children. I was struck by how their work in the salon was itself enabled by home-based childcare provided by other migrant women. As an alternative to formal childcare, which was unaffordable for working-class South Asian migrants, some women in the community offered to look after other women's children in their homes for as little as three pounds an hour. This shows the importance of the network of home-based workers in first-generation South Asian migrant communities and how forms of home-based work such as childminding enable other women such as beauticians to work outside the home.

Beauty is also a form of work that can be done at/from home. Although largely unexplored in the academic literature on home-based work (with the exception of Hewamanne, 2012 in the US-based South Asian diaspora), beauty provides many a woman the opportunity to generate income from home by providing services to fellow South Asian women. Both Noor and Anita started by providing beauty services from home before they accumulated sufficient capital to lease shops. What enabled ethnic entrepreneurs like them to set up their own businesses was personal savings accumulated through long-term residence in the UK and the right to work there. Noor and Anita thus acted as role models who had not only negotiated the constraints of gender norms by establishing successful businesses but had also accumulated the material means to support other women from their communities, especially those who had recently arrived in the country. Ethnic minority business owners often act as community leaders. At the individual level, their businesses enhance their

potential for upward socio-economic mobility; at the community level, they create opportunities for other community members (Wang & Morrell, 2015). However, the role of first-generation migrant women in Britain remains understudied in relation both to entrepreneurship and to management of family businesses (Dhaliwal, 1998).

Noor and Anita both articulated the imperative to 'help other women' without my having to ask, albeit in slightly different ways.

Noor usually recruited other Muslim women who were in need of jobs but had no prior knowledge of beauty work as apprentices. She trained them while paying them a small daily stipend during their apprenticeship period and later hired them on a full-time basis. Sara, who worked with her for a couple of years, was one example. She had been a client who had confided in Noor about her alcoholic husband and his squandering all their money on alcohol and drugs. She had an NVQ in childminding and worked as a day-care assistant, a job that did not earn her enough even to pay the rent. Noor promised to teach her beauty work and invited her to become an apprentice in her salon. Sara seemed to prefer beauty work to childminding and I saw her becoming more and more confident as time passed. At the time of my fieldwork, Sara was paid £40-50 a day (depending on the amount of business that day) which was the standard wage for a trained beauty worker in salons like Anita's and Noor's. Noor told me that she wanted to train Sara fully and then help her open her own beauty salon, although she faced threats from Sara's family members who were opposed to the idea. Noor acted as an informal mentor to Sara, helping her get her family life and her right to work documents in order. However, Sara stopped working at Noor's salon after protracted lockdowns created financial uncertainty and went back to childminding. Noor did not anticipate this outcome, viewing Sara as her protégé and friend, and perceived her departure and her abandoning beauty work as an act of betrayal that she brought up whenever an opportunity presented itself.

While an apprenticeship system of this sort created opportunities for other women, it also worked to Noor's advantage as women without formal training or professional qualification in hair and beauty commanded lower wages. It also let her handpick her assistants, depending on her likes and dislikes, and allowed her to train them in her own style of beauty work. Beauticians have different ways of doing things that create an individual style and they find it more convenient and agreeable to work with people trained in the same style. At the same time, Noor seemed to be sincerely invested

in the well-being of her assistants, who were more than employees to her. Also, given that Muslim women have much lower rates of labour force participation in the UK than migrant women from other backgrounds, providing women with the skills to do beauty work creates valuable opportunities for them to continue to generate income, whether or not they decide to continue working at the same salon. Being able to work outside the home also generates other benefits for women, some of which may be indirect.

Farzaneh, a migrant woman from Afghanistan, had first walked into Noor's salon for a haircut eight years ago. She then started dropping by whenever she was in the neighbourhood for grocery shopping. One day Noor asked her if she would like to help her out in the salon for one or two days a week. Thus, Farzaneh started to learn beauty work from Noor, for a small stipend. During my fieldwork, Farzaneh came to the salon one day a week, allowing Noor to take the day off.

> Nandita: What do you like about beauty work?
>
> Farzaneh: When I come here, I enjoy. When I sit at home, it's not nice. This is the one thing I do for myself one day of the week. Rest of the days I am cleaning and cooking. Coming here makes me feel proud that I can do something outside of home.

Farzaneh also mentioned that meeting other women in the salon was important for her mental health. She regarded Noor not as a boss but as a friend; she could tell Noor anything about her life and get good advice.

Unlike Noor, Anita only employed women who were fully trained in beauty work, after testing their abilities by asking for a demonstration of their skills. She framed the idea of 'helping others' as being able to employ migrant women in need of jobs but also being able to provide them with as many hours of work as they needed. She deemed it a personal failure not to fulfil her responsibility towards them if she was unable to give them enough hours in the week during lean periods. Unlike Noor, however, she emphasised prior training, if not professional qualification, when hiring. The only time I saw her make an exception was when she hired Sheetal as an apprentice. Sheetal was a single mother in need of work. She had recently separated from her abusive husband and was struggling to find work that would allow her flexibility as the single mother of an infant. Although she had an NVQ in care work, she was afraid to go back to working in a care home after the COVID-19 pandemic.

She was a client who had confided in Anita and asked for help, leading to her being hired as an apprentice. Once Sheetal was trained to a level enabling her to work with clients on her own, Anita started paying her daily wages. However, Sheetal left within a year as she was not happy with the wages she was receiving. While she believed that she had learnt enough and deserved to be paid as much as the others, Anita thought she still had a long way to go.

In both these cases, the unhappy endings demonstrated that, despite the friendship and affection between the salon owners and their apprentices, their relationship was still predicated on economic viability. The arrangements lasted as long as they worked for both parties. While Noor and Anita were keen to create opportunities for migrant women in need, their doing so could not be separated from the economic logic of being able to train an assistant in their own style while benefiting from her slightly cheaper labour. That said, beauty work is a set of skills that once learnt can be deployed independently or elsewhere. Thus, the salon owners' contribution to their communities could not easily be dismissed. For working-class migrant women, the beauty salon was a port of call in times of need, a space where they could transition from clients to workers and acquire new skills.

Creating jobs, however, was not the only way in which salon owners and beauticians helped other women. First-generation migrant women with low educational attainment and knowledge of English often came to the beauty salon to get help with filling school admission forms for their children, writing official letters or booking appointments online. The salon was also a hub of the community – if one client mentioned that she needed work and another client mentioned that she was looking to hire a cook or a carer, salon owners like Anita connected them both. The salon thus formed the basis of a network of support for first-generation South Asian migrant women in London.

5.5. Fraught Intimacy or the limits of gendered sameness

In the previous sections of this chapter, I have shown how gender intimacy is created in Noor's Hair & Beauty and Anita's Hair & Beauty through women's talk and practical acts of support. I have employed gender as a lens to analyse intimacy between women who often share ethnic, religious and/or class backgrounds. Practices of gender intimacy pose a challenge to migrant women's traditional gender roles as wives and mothers.

In this section, I will look at the limitations of gender-based intimacy, as such an intimacy operates on a narrow understanding of what it is to live the life of a (South Asian) woman. As I have shown in this chapter, gender intimacy stems from shared experience. It is rooted in knowledge -- lived and embodied -- of gender norms, roles and ideology. Cultural identification plays an extremely important role in the way these experiences of womanhood become immediately recognisable to South Asian women, such that they can relate to them easily. However, even when the same 'labels' apply to a group of women – first-generation South Asian migrants, in this case -- it does not imply 'the existence of any checklist of attributes that all those with the same label have in common' (Young, 1994: 714). While women of similar backgrounds may have common gendered experiences for the most part, their experiences might also differ from each other. As feminist theory has clearly impressed upon us, members of the category of 'women' do not necessarily share the same interests and desires (Mohanty, 1991). Neither do members of the category of South Asian migrant women. While Euro-American feminists have been criticised for homogenising women of the global south as victims of patriarchal oppression, much less attention has been paid to how such an imperative can also arise from within.

Gender-based intimacy is so steeped in sameness that it fails to reckon with difference. Such a form of intimacy works by homogenising female experiences. While gender intimacy affirms women's experiences as a group so that women stop seeing their experiences as 'merely' personal, it also invalidates some women's experiences. Gender intimacy both draws on and reproduces a narrow repertoire of female experiences to such an extent that it becomes difficult to validate experiences that fall outside this range. Normally, a person's solidarity is most readily available to those with whom that person shares similarities and less readily so to those who the person believes to be different (Kavanagh, 2020). In the South Asian beauty salon, the ground for this difference is often whether a woman is perceived as morally 'good' or 'bad'.

Yen Lu Espiritu (2001) has argued that gender is a vehicle for racialized migrants to assert cultural superiority over the dominant group. She shows how Filipina women in the US construct their own virtuosity in contrast to the sexual immorality of white women. However, Espiritu warns that claiming cultural superiority through morality comes at the cost of reinforcing masculinist and patriarchal values. These values that inform the notion of ideal womanhood are domesticity, chastity and traditional gender roles. This also results in framing the sexuality of adult women within

heterosexual monogamy while completely denying the sexuality of unmarried woman. In another study conducted with women of refugee backgrounds in the UK, Linda Morrice (2017) found that those women claimed compulsory heterosexuality, sex within marriage, modesty and purity as their values in contrast to sexual permissiveness, alcohol consumption and smoking that they ascribed to British women.

My findings in both the salons resonated with Espiritu's and Morrice's. From the personal details beauticians heard from them, they constructed an understanding of white women as lacking moral values and belonging to unstable families. Sexual promiscuity, consumption of alcohol, immodest clothing and atheism were some of the attributes presented as evidence of their moral decline. The ideal womanhood of South Asian women was constructed in opposition to the lamentable traits noticed in white women. While similar gender roles or notions of womanhood may have been prescribed in South Asia as well, in the UK they also took on the additional burden of boundary-making, especially in relation to white women. South Asian women deemed 'bad' or immoral, then, were seen as betraying national/ethnic values alongside that of gender. They had become just like white women.

While I witnessed a beautician at Anita's Hair & Beauty retching and walking out mid-service on a middle-aged Indian woman who had asked her to take a video of her waxed pubic area for her lover, the vignette I present below represents my argument better. In this encounter at Noor's Hair & Beauty, I felt that there was a complete failure of intimacy based on gender because the client's experiences could not be rendered legible within the existing 'vocabulary' of South Asian women's experience.

A middle-aged woman with a dishevelled appearance peeked through the door of Noor's Hair & Beauty to ask if she could get a haircut. Inside the salon, I was chatting with Tasneem, a religious Muslim woman from the neighbourhood, while Noor was praying in the private massage room. I informed the woman that she could come in for a haircut as Noor was free. The woman said that she would come in after 'having a fag'. Tasneem gave me a puzzled look, so I made a gesture of smoking a cigarette. Noor stepped out after praying and asked what was going on. Tasneem informed her that a client would be on her way after a 'fag'. 'I didn't know what "fag" means, but Nandita told me it means smoking a cigarette,' she said, rather dramatically. 'How would we know

about such things?' said Noor, '[It's] not like we've ever smoked a cigarette in our lives.' 'She does not smoke either but she knows,' said Tasneem, pointing at me. 'That's because she has experience of the world. I am in my salon all day and you are at home,' said Noor. Then the two women started a discussion on whether smoking cigarettes was considered 'haram (forbidden)' or 'halal (permissible)' in Islam. This discussion had evidently been spurred by a moral anxiety about the client, visibly South Asian, smoking a cigarette. We could see the woman through the glass pane of the salon smoking while her husband stood by her side. A discussion ensued on how she looked much older than her well-dressed husband, and how dishevelled she was by comparison.

When the woman, Tina, came in, I washed her hair and prepared her for a haircut. When Noor finally attended to her, the first thing she asked was if the man standing outside was her *partner* (as opposed to husband). Tina said that he was her husband and the father of her two sons. Relieved by the answer, Noor asked if she works. Tina answered that she used to work as a teacher until a car accident left her partially blind. She had grown nervous about going out on her own and had to stop working. 'Does your husband look after you?' asked Noor. Tina's answer was in the affirmative but curt. Noor went on to ask some more probing questions about Tina's husband. As the hair cut progressed, Tina became more open to sharing information about her personal life. 'Well, you know…,' she began, 'before my accident, we used to smoke marijuana. I mean, nothing serious, we just rolled a joint here and there'. Noor and Tasneem exchanged glances. The responsibility to explain what Tina meant by rolling a joint again fell on me as marijuana was not a word that was familiar to Noor or Tasneem. I was nervous about what else Tina was going to 'confess' and how Noor and Tasneem would react. My anxiety was also admittedly about maintaining my own moral image as I wondered if my knowledge of things 'good' women were not supposed to know about would be taken as complicity.

Tina went on to describe how she had to come to terms with living an unexciting life after her accident. As she began to spend time at home, her husband stopped going out as well. He then turned to religion. Tina said that although she was born into a Roman Catholic family in India, and her husband into an Irish Catholic family, they had both been atheists until her accident. 'But after my accident, he started going to church …he started with his "Hail Mary",' complained Tina. 'So, isn't that good?' Noor interrupted. 'It's good but one should be able to have fun in life! I am tired. He has

become so boring in the last few years. He has his church and his church friends and his "Hail Mary",' recounted Tina, with tears in her eyes. 'All the time: "Hail Mary". I can't deal with that anymore'.

'But he looks after you, right?' said Noor, at a loss for words. 'Yes, he looks after me but he is boring!' said Tina.

Everyone fell silent. Neither Noor nor Tasneem knew what to say to comfort Tina. Noor, who usually had a repository of advice, seemed to have been struck speechless. It was not a problem she had ever come across before. Her clients usually told her stories of domestic violence and/or of financial troubles. But this client's problem was that her husband was religious and boring. In the experience of religious women whose husbands are deemed 'bad' only if they are alcoholic and/or abuse their wives, Tina's story did not make sense. It also reflected the limitations of South Asian women's gendered understandings of masculinity. Whether one was Muslim, Hindu or atheist, one did not have the vocabulary for a man who caused distress to his wife not through violence or failure to provide adequately but by being boring. Here, Tina's South Asian ethnicity made matters worse by leading Noor and Tasneem to categorise her as an immoral woman who did not deserve their sympathy. This event revealed to me the fault lines of intimacy and solidarity based on gender.

5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how gender intimacy is a form of diasporic intimacy created in the space of the beauty salon where first-generation migrant women meet each other. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, it is their quest for beauty that brings women to the beauty salon, but once they are there, they make other things happen. The beauty salon emerges as a space where women articulate a limited resistance to gender norms by emphasising female agency in being able to beautify their bodies and spend leisure time in the salon. They also strategise together to find ways of making husbands contribute more to housework and gaining financial independence for themselves. This strategic resistance to gender norms arises in post-migratory contexts, enabled through 'women's talk' as well as practical acts of solidarity in the beauty salon, with the aim of making migrant women's everyday lives more liveable.

At both Noor's Hair & Beauty and Anita's Hair & Beauty, women engage in few-holds-barred conversations that draw on gendered sameness and share useful information and tips. Such

'women's talk' also involves indulging in sexual banter in the company of other women, posing a challenge to 'respectable' femininity. In the beauty salon, first-generation migrant women can also learn new skills and start earning an income through beauty work.

This demonstrates the role played by salon owners such as Noor and Anita who emerge as community leaders. As women who have navigated both patriarchal familial structures and economic barriers, they are able to advise other women. The fact that they come from similar class and migration backgrounds makes it easy for clients to relate with and seek guidance from them. From encouraging women to think of bodily autonomy to helping them generate income, salon owners Anita and Noor mobilise the intimacy generated through their work to empower other women. For first-generation migrant women, especially those who are newly arrived and lack female support networks of sisters and girlfriends in the UK, meeting other women in the beauty salon can be valuable. Experiencing the beauty salon as a site of leisure enables them to talk, laugh and indulge themselves in the company of other women. They also get advice on everything, from how to navigate the marital household to dealing with administration. As first-generation migrant women often tend to be looked at as symbolic of home and reproducers of culture and tradition in the community, the beauty salon allows them to engage with different perspectives on womanhood.

It is, however, important to remember that gender intimacy is enacted within the framework of compulsory heterosexuality. Cultural identification, the basis of such intimacy, is also its biggest limitation. The limits of the imagination of women's intimacy and solidarity are circumscribed by definitions of 'good' and 'bad' woman, as defined by dominant gendered, understandings of South Asian femininity and masculinity. The empathy of salon owners often does not extend to women who are labelled 'bad' or unusual in their books. Whether or not one can engage in affective empathy with another person depends upon whether you share the same beliefs and worldview (Betzler & Keller, 2021). Thus, the ambit within which gender intimacy plays out in the South Asian beauty salon excludes non-heterosexual women, 'overly' sexual women, women who exercise their sexuality outside of marriage and women who smoke and drink. Having said that, the value of gender intimacy in the beauty salon that empowers women to mount small acts of resistance to traditional gender roles still cannot be underestimated.

Chapter 6 - Ethnic Intimacy: Homemaking in the South Asian Beauty Salon

6.1. Introduction

'If you wish to go home to India or Pakistan,' a deep male voice announced in Urdu, 'contact our travel agency for the cheapest flights'. 'If you find cheaper tickets anywhere else, our travel company promises a full refund'.

'If you cannot go home due to the pandemic this year,' declared a lyrical female voice in Gujarati, 'you can at least have the taste of home in England'. 'Try the Kenyan Chevdo by Bhartiben. A hot and spicy snack processed from Kenyan potatoes, known to be the sweetest in the world. A recipe handed down from generation to generation, available in Asian stores near you'.

Reference to 'home' was a constant on Sunrise Radio, which called itself the biggest South Asian radio channel in London. Without Sunrise Radio, the ambience in Anita's Hair & Beauty was incomplete. At the salon, women expected to hear the latest Bollywood hits, filmy gossip, news and nostalgia-dipped advertisements like the ones mentioned above while getting a beauty treatment. Similarly, at Noor's Hair & Beauty, Noor played evergreen Bollywood melodies from the 1970s or the latest hits on her phone while working. Listening to Bollywood music was an integral part of the experience of getting a beauty treatment at both Anita's and Noor's salons.

A beauty salon is produced as a women-only space through signage, informal sanctions and reliance on common sense about gender-segregated spaces. The ways in which it is produced as a South Asian space, however, is far more complex. There is no formal or informal rule stating that such a salon is for South Asian clients only. The location of the salon certainly plays a part in attracting a higher number of South Asian clients than clients of other ethnicities, but the clientele for the beauty salons is not formed exclusively of women who live in the vicinity. South Asian women visited both Noor's Hair & Beauty and Anita's Hair & Beauty from much further away: from Outer London suburbs or even towns a few hours drive from London. Many of them maintained an unwavering loyalty to their salon of choice. Some were recommended to visit the salon by friends whilst others found it by searching online. To a discerning eye, the names of the salons and the beauticians gave away their ethnic, even religious, backgrounds. A first-time client at Noor's chirpily announced that she had googled for a Pakistani salon and stumbled upon Noor's Hair & Beauty. 'How could you be

so sure that I was Pakistani?' asked Noor. 'It was obvious from your name,' the woman answered. The names of the salons, thus, are the first indicators that signal to a diasporic clientele that the salon might be owned by a South Asian woman.

Not every salon owned and staffed by first-generation South Asian women is, however, a South Asian space. When speaking of a diasporic space, I am referring to a salon that does not shy away from its South Asian identity and, indeed, intentionally creates a South Asian atmosphere. I have visited other salons in London that emphasise the quality of their services while neutralising the cultural specificities of their South Asian owner and beauticians. In such salons, procedures and services are standardised and provided by English-speaking beauticians in uniforms. In other words, these salons produce what Lalaie Ameeriar (2017: 3) has called a 'sanitised sensorium' whereby the sights, smells and sounds characterising migrant women as such are erased to avoid detection as 'other' by clients. These kinds of salons endeavour to suppress 'culturally embodied difference' in a bid to attract a white, middle-class clientele (Longhurst, Ho & Johnston, 2008: 209). They do not wish to present themselves as South Asian while at the same time drawing on cheap, racialised labour provided by working-class South Asian beauticians.

While the ethnicity of the beauticians and the demographics of the neighbourhood can play a role in the South Asian nature of the salon, then, it cannot fully explain how the beauty salon is produced as a South Asian space. Nor is ethnic intimacy an automatic product of the co-presence of South Asian bodies in the salon. If the suppression of difference could be said to be deliberate in other salons, at Noor's Hair & Beauty and Anita's Hair & Beauty, there was a will to let that difference be; even nurture it. Therefore, the creation of ethnic intimacy was an intentional process spearheaded by Noor and Anita, one that also involved the beauticians and the clients.

In this chapter, I argue that ethnic intimacy is created through homemaking in the beauty salon. It is through practices of homemaking that migrant women understand the space of the salon as a site of ethnic intimacy. The home can be realised at a range of social scales. The metaphor of home can signify both the domestic and the nation (Brickell, 2012). Hence, I will show in this chapter how homemaking in the South Asian beauty salon takes places on two different scales: one where the salon is made to resemble a welcoming 'home' and the other where the salon becomes reminiscent of the 'homeland'. I look at the spatial and the symbolic practices through which this is achieved.

By producing the South Asian beauty salon as home, salon owners, beauticians and clients enable a reading of the salon as intimate. As the home is a priori considered a site of intimacy, homemaking in semi-public space such as beauty salon imbues it with warmth and intimacy. In this chapter, I look at different registers of ethnic intimacy that enable homemaking in the salon. The concept of ethnic intimacy is expansive as the mechanisms used to create it are not constrained by national borders but have a wider appeal -- much like the 'South Asian' radio channel that plays Bollywood songs in Hindustani and advertisements in Gujarati, Urdu and Punjabi while conducting the rest of its programming in English. Thus, I also aim to illustrate in this chapter how 'South Asian' becomes a useful heuristic to capture the nature of ethnic intimacy in the beauty salon.

6.2. Understanding migrant homemaking

Literatures on belonging often describe belonging as feeling 'at home' (Antonsich, 2010: 646). Because migrants produce the home as a 'utopian place' in their imagination through wilful play of memory and forgetting, they yearn to replicate home-like conditions in new places that they migrate to (Miller, 2002: 48). Migrants desire to feel at home by physically or symbolically reconstituting places in ways that provide ontological security and continuity in the context of migration (Brah, 1996; Fortier, 2006).

Homemaking as an analytic concept refers to 'a range of spatialised social practices through which migrants try to reproduce, reconstruct and possibly rebuild meaningful home-like settings, feelings and relationships' (Boccagni, 2017: 26). Homemaking includes all the practices through which people make themselves at home in a given social context, within the structure of opportunities accessible to them (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). The homemaking practices of migrants are strongly informed by affective imaginaries of the homeland and a desire to create continuity. Homemaking leads to place attachment through reproduction of familiarity, safety and intimacy. Therefore, it involves appropriating material culture as well as institutionalising familiar routines and relationships (Gowricharn, 2021).

Migrant homemaking is a multiscalar and multi-sited process (Bertolani, Bonfanti & Boccagni, 2021). Alison Blunt and Olivia Sheringham (2019: 817) have used the concept of 'urban domesticity' to indicate that migrant homemaking practices can also take place in public or semi-public spaces. By advancing an understanding of the domestic and the urban as mutually constitutive, this concept

brings together the two spheres that have historically been understood as separate from each other. As home is a social, psychological and emotive construct, in addition to a spatial one, inscribing public spaces with meaning can turn them into homes (Easthope, 2004). These meanings can be inscribed by both individuals and by groups. For international migrants, feeling at home in a public space, even if momentarily, may be associated with 'the sense of "controlling" it, or of expressing their habitual lifestyles with some degree of freedom from the external gaze and control' (Boccagni & Duyvendak, 2021: 9). This also includes the freedom to participate in religious or leisure-based activities with fellow migrants in public spaces. This ability to appropriate space and write oneself onto it has been considered key to a sense of civic belonging (Lefevre, 1996).

Homemaking can provide an original analytical category to contribute to debates on migrant integration (Boccagni & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2023). By emphasising how migrants settle into new environments by forming place attachments and exerting a degree of control over spaces where they often have limited opportunities and rights to do so, homemaking becomes an indicator of migrant integration grounded in local embeddedness. Homemaking helps migrants cultivate incipient rootedness and a sense of belonging in the city on their own terms. It includes both a sense of pride in the past and hope in the future (Hondagneu-Sotelo *et al.*, 2021).

In pointing at a limitation of how homemaking has been used in academic literature, Ruben Gowricharn (2021) implores researchers to ground their use of the concept in an empirical understanding of how different ethnic groups and migrant generations create a sense of belonging. He argues that in understanding homemaking in abstract and individual terms, previous scholars have overlooked the role homemaking plays in formation of community bonds. Homemaking can be a useful concept in understanding the dynamics of internal group bonding in diaspora (Gowricharn, 2021). Homemaking can be understood empirically by taking a spatial approach:

> There is a promise in investigating how certain (semi)public spaces reproduce, or scale up, 'domestic' routines, rationales and symbols; how they create the conditions for attendees to nourish a sense of home, out of their material, ritual and sensorial infrastructures; and how this process interacts with the views, needs and lifestyles of people themselves (Bertlolani *et al.*, 2021: 423).

In this chapter, I illustrate how homemaking unfolds in the beauty salon, thereby creating ethnic intimacy.

6.3. Symbolic homemaking in the beauty salon: (Re)producing the homeland

The diaspora claim ownership of the places and countries in which they settle by imbuing spaces with a distinct home-like sensory environment (Werbner & Fumanti, 2013). This sensory atmosphere is heightened in the ethnic neighbourhood, creating a precondition for the production of the beauty salon as a diasporic space. For migrant women visiting the beauty salon, a home-like sensory experience begins at the street level much before they have stepped into the salon. From the sight and smell of South Asian vegetables, fruit, spices and herbs to the sound of traders, chatter and music, the multicultural street evokes nostalgia and a sense of belonging. Ethnic neighbourhoods, markets and streets evoke a sense of home, mediated by co-ethnic sociability (Botticello, 2007). They also act as repositories of signs, symbols, artifacts, aromas, languages and food that connect migrants with their homeland, often in hybridised forms (Boccagni & Duyvendak, 2021). Ethnic neighbourhoods provide opportunities for migrant women to dress up, shop, share food and gossip (Pande, 2018). While such areas may be marked as ethnic enclaves and suffer from spatial stigma, they signify comfort and familiarity to first-generation migrants. What this also indicates is the multiple scales at which home is established and felt (Blunt & Dowling, 2006).

Noor's Hair & Beauty was located on Cinnamon Road, known for its curry houses. It was lined on both sides with Indian and Pakistani eateries alongside a mosque and a community centre for Muslims, a gurudwara, a church, and halal butchers and grocers from Pakistan and Afghanistan. Bayleaf Road, on which Anita's Hair & Beauty was located, housed two large Hindu temples, a mosque and a church, in addition to a plethora of small shops selling Indian clothes, jewellery, kitchenware, groceries, spices and knickknacks, creating a characteristically Indian ambience. The familiarity evoked by the multicultural street– the sight of a middle-aged man frying crispy orange jalebis in a huge cauldron outside his sweet-shop or the fragrance of ripe yellow mangoes from India and Pakistan wafting in from the shops in summer -- also set expectations of the beauty salon.

Inside the salon, homemaking practices involved retaining some of the cultural and emotional aspects of the past through everyday practices such as use of native language and ways of eating and dressing. As the sense of identity is tied to the sense of home, this place attachment is expressed via

language, food and music (Easthope, 2004). Speaking of identity, an African-born woman of Gujarati origin I met at Anita's Hair & Beauty said to me that her mother had never let her and her siblings forget who they were and where they came from. She named three elements that were key to this remembering: food, Bollywood and language. They cooked and ate Gujarati food at home; watched Bollywood films; and no matter which language they spoke outside, they always had to speak in Gujarati at home.[5] Thus, the project of homemaking, based on an imaginary of the homeland, is also related to forming a sense of self. For first-generation migrants, but also for subsequent generations that may never have lived in the 'homeland', reproducing habits, routines and rituals that correspond with one's memories of home make life more familiar and predictable. Feeling at home, then, may mean feeling 'normal' i.e., not being perceived as out-of-place for reproducing the habits from home (Boccagni & Duyvendak, 2021). In subsequent sections, I look at how homemaking is enacted in the space of the beauty salon through the registers of language, food and music.

6.3.1. Language

Language is one of the most important cultural factors that create a sense of home (Antonsich, 2010). Speaking in the same language can evoke a sense of community, the 'warm sensation' of being among people who not only understand what you say, but also what you mean (Ignatieff 1994: 7). Language can be felt as an element of intimacy (hooks 2009: 24). As migrant women usually spoke their mother tongue at home, the opportunity to speak it and be understood in the beauty salon immediately qualified it as a sphere of intimacy.

At Anita's Hair & Beauty, the South Asian languages one usually heard were Hindi/Hindustani, Nepali, Maithili, Gujarati and Konkani. Whilst everyone in the salon spoke Hindi/Hindustani, Gujarati was also spoken widely by both salon workers and clients. As a result of working with beauticians from the Gujarati-speaking Indian states of Gujarat and Diu, Anita had begun to understand the language and to use common words and phrases herself. It was common to encounter first-generation migrant women who did not speak any English at the salon. If they were Hindi, Gujarati, Konkani or Nepali speakers, they relied on being able to communicate with the beauticians in their own language. Tamil speakers, from the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu or

[5] This is part of an extended vignette that I analyse in Chapter 7.

Sri Lanka, usually came to the salon accompanied by their English-speaking, second-generation daughters. Anita referred to them by the Tamil words for older or younger sister, immediately making them feel welcome at her salon.

At Noor's Hair & Beauty, Noor spoke Urdu and Punjabi. Her assistants spoke Urdu, Punjabi, Farsi and Pashto. With Pakistani clients, Noor spoke in Urdu or Punjabi. With others, out of necessity, she used English.

In both the salons, English was spoken only when necessary, to communicate with English-speaking clients or clients who did not speak any of the other languages spoken by the beauticians. Having lived in England for many years, Noor and Anita had good working knowledge of English. Most of the assistant beauticians, however, barely spoke any English, except for a few who had lived in England for longer periods of time. They usually learnt English at work gradually over the years by communicating with English-speaking clients.

Even though the interaction between a beautician and a client might have started off in basic English, the moment they discovered a shared language, there was a tangible shift in their level of intimacy and sociality. Even in interactions that started off with some degree of scepticism, discovering a shared language could provide a starting point for building intimacy.

Once, a woman wearing trackpants, T-shirt and a hijab came into Anita's Hair & Beauty with her child in a buggy. She enquired in English about getting her facial hair bleached. Beautician Ritu, who often came across as biased against Muslim clients, answered her in a rather cold fashion. Salon owner Anita asked Ritu to go ahead with the bleach but perhaps owing to Ritu's attitude, the client asked if Anita could do the bleach herself. Anita applied the bleach but then she got busy with another client. When Ritu began to take the bleach off the client's face after it had dried, the client said something in Gujarati. Ritu was pleasantly surprised. 'Are you from Gujarat?' asked Ritu, her attitude suddenly softening, leading to a friendly conversation in Gujarati. In this case, while religion was initially a barrier for Ritu to establish intimacy with the client, discovery of a shared language provided a starting point to overcome that barrier.

6.3.2. Food

Amongst migrant women, who are generally responsible for cooking in their homes, food becomes the central means through which the homeland can be recreated (Mannur, 2007). Food often helps women create or access a community of belonging in a new and foreign land. Lisa Law (2001: 275) writes evocatively about Filipina domestic workers who gather in central Hong Kong every Sunday and ceremonially consume Filipino food, creating a sensory landscape that lets them enjoy the 'taste, aroma and texture of home'. She describes the involvement of the senses in community formation like this:

> 'Home cooking' thus becomes an active creation: a dislocation of place, a transformation of Central, a sense of home. In savouring Filipino food, for example, senses of taste, touch, vision and smell all become active. Eating thus becomes a productive and self-conscious pursuit, not merely an organic, innate or derivative activity (Law, 2001: 276).

In contrast to high-end salons which define themselves as neutral spaces devoid of the 'mundane and messy smells and odours of everyday life', the South Asian salon became identifiable by those very smells and odours (Chugh & Hancock, 2009: 469). Whilst consuming food would be considered unprofessional and unhygienic by both beauticians and clients in a high-end salon, nobody seemed to find food out-of-place in the neighbourhood South Asian salon. In retail and service industries, the rule is for customers not to see where workers have their meals as food bears the sign of the private lives of workers (Wilson, 2016). Hence, I was initially surprised to find that the strong aromas of garlic, spices and meat hanging in the air was not deemed unprofessional or bothersome in either of the salons. At both Noor's Hair & Beauty and Anita's Hair & Beauty, beauticians often ate in the presence of clients, without any concern for neutralizing or hiding the strong smells of the food they brought from home.

Noor was a connoisseur of all things fried and spicy. Clients, especially those who lived close to the salon, rarely showed up to Noor's salon empty-handed. They often brought a bowl of hot mutton nihari (a slow-cooked meat stew) or chicken biryani (a dish of meat and rice). The tiny refrigerator in the salon's kitchenette was often overflowing with boxes of food brought by customers. When the salon was not busy, Noor could be found sitting behind the reception desk devouring these delicacies, filling the salon with the aroma of spicy food. Noor was so spoilt for choice that she once confided in me the ranks of her customers in terms of whose *kadhi-pakora* (deep-fried fritters dunked in

yoghurt-based curry) she liked the best. A good *kadhi* was one, she explained to me, in which the yoghurt had been soured by leaving it outside and then simmered on the stove patiently for a very long time, and the *pakodas* or fritters had onion, potato, coriander, spinach and spices in them.

Anita, on the other hand, was not so adventurous when it came to food. She ate plain food without any chilly or spices and abstained from anything that was not homecooked owing to a hyper-sensitive stomach. At her salon, however, lunch was never a dull affair, despite being quick. Even if there were several clients awaiting their turn, Anita sent the assistant beauticians on a lunch break as soon as the clock struck one. The salon workers ate together in the small annexe used for facials and waxing, spreading out a buffet of home-cooked food on the massage table. The smell of chicken, fish and vegetable curries diffused into the salon, mixing with the fragrance of shampoos and face creams. Very often, clients also brought samosas, snacks or 'prasad' i.e., offerings of food made to the Gods and then distributed to the devotees in the nearby temple. Not just beauticians, but also clients were allowed to consume food in Anita's salon:

> Anita: We say [to our clients] sit, eat, drink ... They say that they feel at home. They say that it feels like they are visiting somebody in their house. If they ask, 'Can I eat my food?' we are like, 'Please eat. It's your food, your mouth, your wish'. We don't mind. But most people in other salons do mind. Because then their salon smells of food.
>
> Rekha: Yeah, they ask you not to eat in the salon. But you saw how she ate her lunch here? [pointing at a client]
>
> Anita: So they say that they get an intimate feeling in our salon. Once somebody comes here, they don't go anywhere else. Even people from far away come here because they get a feeling like home. It doesn't feel like they went to a salon.

Food can help people feel at home and it can also provoke racism (Bailey, 2017). Being able to feel at home somewhere because the smell of your food is not stigmatised becomes particularly meaningful given the racism that has historically targeted South Asian migrants for the smell of their food. Both race and racism in England have been shaped through visceral encounters with South Asians and the smell of 'curry' emanating from their bodies as well as their homes. As Anoop Nayak (2010: 2385) observes in his ethnography of a suburb in the English midlands:

> The concentration on smells and pollution – 'a paki's house stinks of curry and shit' -- serves to make South Asian bodies, food, and homes abject, going beyond visual registers of difference to mark these encounters with deeply imbued race affects.

Instances of landlords refusing to rent houses to South Asians because they smell of garlic and 'white flight' from neighbourhoods with South Asian populations for the same reason are also well-documented (Buettner, 2008). The smells that can evoke a sense of home for the diaspora can also signify their cultural difference to other communities. The beauty salon, then, acted as a safe space where these smells and tastes could be indulged in without fear of judgement. Consuming food in the beauty salon also demonstrated the importance of commensality, or the act of eating and sharing food with others, that is an essential part of feeling a sense of community (Bailey, 2017). This applied to sharing of both homecooked meals as well as ceremonial food such as offerings from the temple.

6.3.3. Music

While Anita tuned into South Asian FM channels on the radio, Noor played Bollywood music on her phone – depending on her mood, anything from a medley of new Bollywood hits to evergreen melodies of the 1970s. Although neither Noor nor Anita was from India, the cultural appeal of Bollywood songs transcends national boundaries in South Asia.

One afternoon, Anjana, a woman in her late 30s, walked into Anita's Hair & Beauty with her two daughters. Elegantly dressed in a blouse and a skirt, she had a professional air about her. The salon was very busy, animated by the clatter of hair colours being mixed vigorously in plastic bowls and the whirring of hairdryers. Anjana took a seat on the bench in the waiting area, next to me. A popular song from the 2000s filmed with an actor known as the 'serial kisser of Bollywood' was playing on the radio, cutting through the hubbub. Her face broke into a smile. We had not spoken to each other until then, but she turned to me, confident that we shared the same cultural lexicon and said, 'These songs make you so nostalgic'. 'Indeed,' I smiled back at her, inquiring where she was from. She named a city in the southern Indian state of Kerala.

Anjana had travelled to Bayleaf Road all the way from a 'proper English town by the sea'. She recounted that the reason she and her family lived there was her job as a nurse in the local hospital. Although she was aware that many would consider her fortunate to be living by the sea, she did not

like it there. Unlike Bayleaf Road, there were not enough of 'our people' in that town, she lamented. 'Every time I come here,' she said, 'I feel a sense of belonging'. She, her husband and their two daughters drove to Bayleaf Road once every couple of months for a daytrip that involved shopping, eating in Indian restaurants and going to the beauty salon. Anjana chanced upon Anita's Hair & Beauty when she was in the area once and had been a customer ever since. The hours passed quickly when she was in the salon getting haircuts for her daughters and herself. She and Anita had animated conversations about their lives in England, demonstrating that nostalgia is simultaneously oriented towards the present and the future as well as towards the past (Blunt, 2003). For Anjana, it was a popular Bollywood song that had prompted a reflection on the search for 'belonging'. The nostalgia evoked by Bollywood music indicated a sense of loss and the impossibility of return while at the same time orienting her towards practices of homemaking in the UK.

Another day, two middle-aged sisters, Sejal and Vijal, came to Anita's Hair & Beauty. Tanzanian-born and of Gujarati origin, Sejal lived in London while Vijal was visiting from Trinidad. In an over-enthusiastic attempt to dye her grey hair at home, Sejal had managed to get multiple colours in her hair which she now wanted Anita to fix. As Anita applied burgundy colour to Sejal's hair, the two sisters reminisced about a variety of things including how dull their youth was compared to that of their grandchildren. Sejal complained about how when her husband had come to ask for her hand, her mother had not even allowed her to see him. She saw him for the first time on the day of their wedding. 'But he turned out fine, didn't he?' Vijal remarked. 'You can say that with the benefit of hindsight. There was no way for me to have known back then whether he would turn out fine or not, as I did not even get to see him,' Sejal protested. The nostalgic mood then led Sejal to profess her love and yearning for Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan, gushing over him like a teenager. It is the kind of nostalgia Anita was unable to comprehend. 'You don't have an Amitabh Bachchan at home?' she asked, referring to Sejal's husband who was the matter of discussion just minutes ago. 'So what if I do? I can still have unrequited love for someone,' Sejal declared with panache.

What both these vignettes signify is the importance of referents. A diasporic community is made up of people who share a lexicon of referents, and consequently, the emotions they are capable of evoking. In both these instances, the intelligibility of Bollywood references among the South Asian diaspora is taken for granted. The diaspora in question here ranges from a first-generation migrant from the south Indian state of Kerala to two Tanzanian-born women of Gujarati origin. Of course,

the 'cultural hegemony' of Bollywood in South Asia has been the subject of much criticism (See Rahman, 2020). At the same time, scholars admit that Bollywood 'bridges borders in the diaspora', transcending the barriers of age, sex, class, region, language, religion and caste (Mohammad-Arif, 2007: 12). Thus, the cultural power of Bollywood films, music and actors in creating a community of collective nostalgia and desire cannot be underestimated. Music, especially, creates a shared cultural language that kindles a sense of familiarity and community across much of South Asia.

One day when little was happening in Noor's salon, part-time beautician Sara stood in front of the mirror scrutinising her reflection, threading stray hair off her face. She seemed more self-absorbed than usual, lost in the private realm of her thoughts. There were no clients to attend to as it had been an unusually lean day for business. I sat on an upholstered bench behind her, watching her reflection in the mirror, humming an Urdu ghazal (poem) that was stuck in my head: '*Mujh se pehli si mohabbat mere mehboob na maang*' (Oh my lover, do not ask me to love you as I once did). 'The song that are you humming, can you sing it louder?' Sara caught me off-guard. I offered to play it for her on my phone instead. 'This is Noor Jehan, a Pakistani singer, you know her?!' she queried, surprised, as I play the song. 'I didn't know that you listen to Pakistani music!' she added. 'I mostly listen to Pakistani music these days,' I told her. 'While we watch Bollywood movies and listen to Indian songs,' she laughed. A client walked in and asked to be waxed, breaking the dry spell. As the client undressed and got ready in the waxing room, I said to Sara, 'You know my favourite lines in this song are the ones that say: "there are sorrows in the world other than love and joys other than union with your lover"'. 'It is true,' she said, mulling it over, in her usual brooding manner. 'Love affects your life too much. You can't think of anything else'. We broke into laughter.

6.4. Spatial homemaking in the beauty salon: the salon as home

Thus far, I have established that ethnic intimacy in the beauty salon is produced using registers of homemaking that create a sense of familiarity and belonging. Ethnic intimacy reminds women what it is like to be Gujarati or Indian or South Asian in the company of other Gujaratis or Indians or South Asians.

In this section, I describe how homemaking in the South Asian beauty salon also involves spatial practices, underlining its importance for first-generation migrant women in particular.

To go back to Anita's quote on how she thinks clients feel in her beauty salon:

> They say that they feel at home. They say that it feels like visiting somebody in their house… Even people from far away come here because they get a feeling like home. It doesn't feel like going to a salon.

Here, I find the phrase 'visiting somebody in their house' to be quite instructive. I intend to suggest that the main area of the beauty salon or the beauty parlour (the term commonly used in South Asia) can be understood as if it were the living room, given that 'salon' or 'parlour' literally means the 'living room' of a house. Thus, in the spatial scheme of homemaking, the beauty salon represents a house with a living room, a kitchen(ette) and a toilet. Although this might seem like an exaggerated reading of the space of the salon, it helps to understand how salon owners as well as clients perceived and used that space. The homeliness of the salon was further emphasised when Anita contrasted the intimate atmosphere in her salon with the experience of 'going to a salon', which was not intended to feel as intimate or homely. A typical salon was supposed to be an economic site, separated from the intimacy of the domestic sphere – a workplace for beauticians and a site of consumption for clients. A neighbourhood South Asian salon, on the other hand, blurred the boundaries between the economic and the intimate.

In Anita's Hair & Beauty, it was common for women from the neighbourhood to pass time in the salon without feeling obliged to request a beauty service. They went there to chat with the beauticians and share a meal together while listening to Bollywood music on the radio. This was also what allowed me to do participant observation in the salon as I was seen as one of the many women who 'hung out' in the salon without being a nuisance. My presence as a researcher did not seem out of place on days when I was merely observing and taking notes instead of helping the beauticians. Seeing the salon as homespace is also what may have prevented women from feeling anxious about social distancing rules when they were in the salon during the coronavirus pandemic. During the height of the pandemic, I noted in my fieldnotes several instances of ten-twelve women crammed together at Maya's Hair & Beauty, appearing relaxed and not wearing masks. Many of them took off their masks after arriving at the salon, as they would have done in their homes. A crowded space may be the very antithesis of the home where people were supposed to 'isolate' during the pandemic but it is important to remember that many migrant women lived in crowded conditions, in multiple-

generation households or non-kin households. A crowded salon, then, might not have felt very different and unlike the home.

The use of the 'salon' as a living room becomes clearer in another excerpt from a group interview I conducted in the salon:

> Nandita: Let's talk about the little details. Like the radio. How did you think of it?
>
> Anita: I also want to have a TV. Really. If only I had the space …when people wait, they must have something to keep them engaged …Music is a kind of therapy, did you know that? TV is even better.
>
> Sheetal (assistant beautician): Then customers will never leave, they will wait until their serial is over.
>
> Anita: I don't have a problem with that. Please come and sit here. Spend some time. I like that. I will never ask anyone to leave. They can enjoy, we can enjoy as well … So, coming back to the radio. You also get to hear the news from time to time. I have a client from Mauritius who says it's only here that she listens to the radio. I really like it. She says that I am her only means to listen to Indian music. Isn't that nice? So many clients say that they are happy to hear Indian songs here. English songs you can hear anywhere. People also say there is an Indian atmosphere here. Family atmosphere. That's something I like to hear.

The very fact that Anita did not mind women spending time in the salon and would not ask them to leave created a certain parallel with the salon as a living room. Her reference to 'family atmosphere' furthered the parallel. I saw something similar at Noor's salon when the family of a client came to 'visit'. As the client - a young girl called Sabina who had come in for body waxing - was about to leave, her female family members paid Noor a call. After Sabina was done, her mother, aunts and grandmother sat in the salon for about half an hour as though they had come to see Noor in her house. The occasion for this visit was that Sabina's maternal grandmother had come from Pakistan. Being regular clients at Noor's salon, Sabina and her mother wanted to introduce their house guest to Noor. It was also mentioned that the grandmother would be getting some beauty services as she was visiting England for the first time. Noor asked if they would like to have some tea or coffee, just as one would with guests who had dropped by at one's home.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Noor also created her salon as an extension of home by mothering her youngest son aged seven. After picking him up from school in the afternoon, she washed him up, fed him and then supervised his homework in the salon. He stayed with her until his father picked him up from the salon in the evening. Sometimes when Noor's husband was away in Pakistan, I saw her chopping vegetables for dinner in the salon's kitchenette between clients. Such routines of domesticity blurred the distinction between home and workplace for the salon owner, while also presenting the salon as home-like for clients.

The kitchenette specifically contributed to making the salon home-like. Due to lack of space, the kitchenette in Anita's salon was a tiny corner in the annexe with a small refrigerator and a microwave. But Noor's salon had a proper kitchenette which provided a place to prepare food for beauticians working in the salon as well as tea and coffee for clients. As with all her assistants, Noor also taught me the recipe for a salad made of lettuce, avocado, tomato and orange, garnished with lemon juice and salted peanuts. On many days during my fieldwork Noor would send me off to buy fresh ingredients and put this salad together in the kitchenette at the back of the salon. Then she would divide it into three portions for Sara, herself and me, and we would eat the salad between serving clients. Eating this healthy and tasty salad together was an act of care and bonding in the face of relentless, back-breaking salon work where the needs of the clients always came first.

It might seem paradoxical that I am advancing a reading of the beauty salon as 'home' while endeavouring to theorise it as an alternative space of intimacy.

Normative ideas, experiences and practices posit the house as home for the heteropatriarchal family (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). The modern home serves as a potent site for normalising heteronormativity and the nuclear family (McKeithen, 2017). Feminist scholars have criticised the home as a contested site for women (Fenster, 2005). It is the ideal home that stands for a space of familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment (hooks 2009). In reality, home can be a privileged site for some but a site of alienation, fear and oppression for others (Varley, 2008).

Homemaking, then, represents the tension between the aspired-for home and the home-as-experienced, or, the ideal and the lived realities of home (Brickell, 2011; Boccagni, 2022). The beauty salon as home is an alternative space of intimacy because the homemaking practices here are initiated by women, for other women, giving them a momentary respite from heteropatriarchal

homemaking. In creating a homely space, beauty salon owners such as Noor and Anita exercised agency in how they shaped a space which belonged to them while at the same time creating a space where other women could feel a temporary but relatively unconstrained sense of belonging, a home away from home. Some of those women who found a sense of home in the salon experienced the heteropatriarchal home as oppressive indeed, as I will illustrate in the next section.

The metaphor of home, however, is irreplaceable in the context of the beauty salon as home is intrinsically tied to the notion of female respectability. Women's location in the home has historically signified sexual respectability (Karusseit, 2007). Thus, the attribution of domesticity to the beauty salon by women could also be seen as imbued with a certain intentionality. It let them access a semi-public space associated with pleasure, vanity, leisure and consumption without seeming disreputable. What characterised this 'home' was that it was a semi-public space where women could stake a claim to belonging while maintaining the status-quo of respectability.

In the following section, I highlight why such a home-like space in the semi-public sphere is important for first-generation migrant women, especially considering the intersections of migration with religion, race and class.

6.4.1. Taking refuge in the salon as homespace

Perspectives that locate diasporic belonging in the right to appropriate public spaces in the city often fail to pay as much attention as might be merited to gendered power relations. They do not take into account migrant women's everyday experiences of fear, exclusion and marginalisation in the city (Fenster, 2005). A conceptualisation of migrants' homemaking in the city as the use and appropriation of public spaces such as streets and parks often excludes or ignores the concerns of women. Women's right to the city is mediated through their experiences of harassment, restrictions on mobility and surveillance from male members of their family or community, and fear of racism. However, I must clarify that none of the women in my study expressed an explicit fear of racism as the reason for not participating in the public sphere. Neither in organic discussions amongst themselves nor in their answers to my explicit questions on the topic did they bring up experiences of racism. This could also be because many of them live and work in ethnic neighbourhoods. What seemed to restrict their mobility in the city, then, was more of an implicit sense that they, with their traditional attire or headscarves and without good knowledge of English or the geography of the

city, did not belong. Thus, there can be different reasons preventing migrant women from participating in the pleasures of the street or the city, highlighting the importance of gender-segregated semi-public spaces such as women's beauty salons.

Noor and I shared a love for South Asian food. We spent an inordinate amount of time walking down memory lane, including indulging in nostalgia about the most clichéd symbol of South Asian-ness -- mangoes. She reminisced about her mother's mango chutney, or how she would squash ripe mangoes and sprinkle them with red chilli powder that would then be consumed with fresh oven-baked bread and freshly chopped onion, while I would remember the various kinds of mango pickles from my childhood. I appreciated Noor's spontaneity when it came to food – forgetting about whatever diet she was on, she immediately craved food after speaking about it and sent me off to buy whatever her heart desired at that moment. Dahi Bhalla chaat (deep-fried lentil balls in yoghurt sauce), samosa, dosa (rice crepes), masala fish fry and dry fruit laddoos (sweets). She never denied herself the pleasures of food but it was important to her that she enjoy these pleasures in the privacy of her beauty salon. Even though Noor was a strong and confident woman, an entrepreneur and salon owner, her experiences with the public sphere had been shaped by her limited exposure to it and consequent distrust.

Just adjacent to Noor's salon stood famous curry-houses, teeming with white Britons and South Asians alike. In August 2020, when the British government launched the 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme, offering a 50% discount on eating in restaurants, I insisted that Noor go out with me for a meal. We went to one of the curry houses and ordered a simple meal of chicken curry and naan. Although the food was delicious, Noor did not seem to enjoy it. She was visibly ill at ease, looking over her shoulder or keeping her head down for the most part. She would later tell me that she was not used to eating out in restaurants. 'You know how these South Asian men are,' she said. 'They talk.'

What was at stake for Noor was something as simple as 'visibility': being 'seen' and then gossiped about and labelled as unrespectable (Green and Singleton, 2007: 117). While being seen eating in a restaurant with her family would not have invited gossip, doing so with a woman friend did not carry the same air of respectability. Scholars have shown how tensions between wanting to go out for fun and leisure and the anxiety of being seen in public and gossiped about leads to self-policing

among Muslim women (Green and Singleton, 2007). The beauty salon protected women against such anxieties of surveillance and gossiping by men known to their family or community. In the space of the salon, women could enjoy the company of their female friends without worrying about what others might think. Alongside sociality, however, the salon also provided privacy that may not have been possible in the family home where a woman was always surrounded by children and household responsibilities.

Once, when I asked Noor what the beauty salon meant to her, she said:

> Sometimes when I am in the salon, I tell my husband I am working. But I am actually not working. For half an hour, quarter of an hour, I do whatever I feel like doing. Sometimes I just sit silently. Whatever I like, I do.

The beauty salon also acted as an oasis – of privacy or sociality – for Noor's customers. Tasneem lived a few houses away from the salon. In her forties, she had moved back in with her parents after her husband of twenty years passed away. As a widowed woman in a religious Muslim family from Pakistan, her mobility was strictly monitored by her younger brother. Tasneem told me categorically that the only two places her family did not mind her visiting were the local library and the beauty salon. It soon became evident to me that she did not come to Noor's Hair & Beauty for purely practical reasons. While she got her eyebrows, upper lips and cheeks waxed, she traded stories about the members of her family. She joked, laughed and recited poetry. Although she paid the full price for the services she used, she never came empty-handed. She brought Tupperware with freshly cooked meat and desserts as though she were visiting a friend. Sometimes, she visited even when she did not need anything done. The beauty salon was a place of sociality for her, the only one she was allowed to go to because it was an all-female space run by a pious Muslim woman from Pakistan, highlighting the importance of the beauty salon as 'home' where a woman could momentarily experience comfort and intimacy even when her dwelling did not afford her the same feelings.

At Anita's Hair & Beauty as well, Anita and the other beauticians often discussed how the beauty salon was regarded as one of the few places where a woman with a controlling husband or mother-in-law was 'allowed' to go. This bears striking resemblance to Purnima Mankekar's (2002) study of Indian grocery stores in California. Mankekar found that husbands who control their wives' mobility still 'allow' them to go to Indian grocery stores by themselves because they deem them to be safe.

What grocery shops and beauty salons share is their association with domesticity, respectability and ethnic-ness. Being an all-women's and quasi-domestic space run by South Asian women, the beauty salon is deemed safe for South Asian women to go to.

The street behind Anita's Hair & Beauty was often occupied by young men from India smoking marijuana and leering at women passing by, providing a contrast to the sense of safety and sociality women experienced inside the salon. As the street is a space of male presence and activity, where men indulge in leisure practices that make women uncomfortable, women need a space of their own where they can momentarily let their hair down while feeling safe. Visiting the beauty salon, thus, becomes one of the ways in which migrant women assert their right to the city and urban belonging.

6.5 Fraught Intimacy

In this chapter, I have shown how migrant women encounter other women like themselves who speak the same language and enjoy the same food in the space of the beauty salon. This creates a feeling of home, leading to ethnic intimacy. This form of ethnic intimacy, predicated on shared language, food and music, facilitates 'boundary crossing' by transcending parochial notions of identity (Anthias, 2013:8). In the South Asian beauty salon, such boundary crossing is often associated with going beyond national identities and migration histories to create belonging through claims to a shared South Asian identity. The modalities of language, food and music often cut across national boundaries and help articulate a common diasporic identity as 'Asian', 'South Asian' or 'our people'. Ethnic intimacy, then, can be a rather expansive diasporic endeavour that often draws on a pan-South Asian identity making it impossible to classify the beauty salons as Indian, Pakistani or Nepali. In terms of their diasporic identity as well as the intimacy they engender, it is possible to understand them only as South Asian.

This kind of South Asian intimacy, however, is built on the exclusion of groups of women who cannot partake in it. Language and food act as registers of exclusion, as much as of inclusion. Commensality, or the act of eating together, follows very specific rules in South Asia due to the notions of purity and pollution associated with food in Hinduism. These rules are centred on vegetarian and 'non-vegetarian' food as well as consumption of pork and beef (Dwyer, 2004). This makes commensality rather impossible between dominant-caste and marginalised-caste Hindus, but also upper-caste Hindus and Muslims or Christians. For example, not once did I witness the sharing of food or meals

between South Asian women and white or black women, or Hindus and Muslims from South Asia in the two beauty salons.

Similarly, the impossibility of a shared language acts as a barrier to intimacy between South Asian women and black and white women. As English is neither the first language of the beauticians nor a language they are fluent in, the problem of translatability can diminish the quality of interactions that take place in English. I observed a few interactions wherein beauticians were ill-at-ease with English-speaking clients, groping for the right words to say something. Once, Noor kept asking a white girl who had come for a haircut with tangled hair, 'Can you do *it* for me?' 'Sorry?' the girl looked at her, puzzled. 'Can you do *it* for me, darling?' Noor said, again. The girl did not understand, and neither did I, that Noor wanted her to comb her hair to detangle the knots but had forgotten the word 'comb'. Language can also be deliberately instrumentalised for othering. Whenever beauticians wanted to make funny or snide remarks about an English-speaking client, they spoke in a South Asian language between them. While the client may not have understood the content of the conversation, the tone often made them feel unwelcome. At other times, beauticians avoided making conversation altogether with English-speaking clients if there was a South Asian person present in the salon with whom they felt more comfortable talking, thus foreclosing intimacy.

South Asian or ethnic intimacy, then, is built on the exclusion of black and white women. There are also differences within South Asians, as will become clear in the next chapter.

6.6. Conclusion

'Tasty Kenyan Chivdo', the jingle of the advertisement played on South Asian FM channels which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, was so catchy that it had firmly planted itself in my memory. One day, I arrived at Anita's Hair & Beauty to find two elderly women of Gujarati origin, regular clients of the salon, waiting to be served. The older of the two did not speak much but smiled at me every time we made eye contact. The salon was busy that day, so Anita tasked me with shampooing the older woman's hair before and after the application of hair dye. I touched her frail skin delicately, gently lowering her head into the wash basin, rubbing her long hair with shampoo. Just then, the Kenyan Chivdo by Bhartiben advertisement played on Sunrise Radio. The younger woman accompanying the woman whose hair I was washing became animated and remarked on the advertisement, words that I could not catch amid the incessant whirring of hair dryers. Later,

out of curiosity, I asked Anita what the woman had said about the advertisement. It turned out that the younger woman was the original Kenyan Chivdo maker, who sold her chivdo machine to the eponymous Bhartiben when she had to move from Kenya to England to look after her older sister, the frail woman whose hair I had carefully washed. Now Bharti Ben's chivdo, a Gujarati snack, too, had travelled from Kenya to England, was being sold in English shops and advertised on a South Asian radio channel which we listened to at Anita's Hair & Beauty.

The South Asian beauty salon is a space of ethnic intimacy where stories, memories and nostalgia abound. It is a space where roots and routes come together to generate a sense of affective belonging for the diaspora. While being physically located in England, the salon evokes the home and the homeland. In doing so, it 'reinforces the sense of belonging to, and inheritance of, a particular ethnic background' (Fortier, 2006: 66).

In this chapter, I have shown how ethnic intimacy is a deliberate process enacted by salon owners, beauticians and customers alike. Migrant women make places pleasurable and homely through homemaking practices that lead to ethnic intimacy. Language, food and music are three registers that allow migrant women to domesticate a semi-public space by exercising control over the implicit rules and expectations that govern this space. In the salon, women can eat homecooked food with all its strong aromas, listen to loud Bollywood music and speak in their native languages, without having to justify these choices. The neighbourhood beauty salon, then, is a space that reaffirms South Asian women's ethnic identity in the everyday. Ethnic intimacy results from migrant women meeting other women like themselves who speak the same language and enjoy the same food in the space of the salon.

This creates a feeling of home. By creating a sense of 'home', migrants create a sense of belonging in the city. Creating familiarity in semi-public spaces like the beauty salon facilitates their 'smooth transition' into a new social environment (Fortier, 2006: 64). Migrant women's limited access to the pleasures of the street and the city can only be understood by considering the intersections of gender, class, race and religion. First-generation migrant women face the risk of surveillance and gossip from men and women of their own communities. This constrains their sense of belonging in public spaces. Class is also crucial to consider here. Many working-class migrant women who enjoy ethnic intimacy in the beauty salon live in overcrowded housing, sharing their dwelling with numerous

people who they may or may not get along with. It creates the need for a space where they can relax without having to justify their choices. Many first-generation women also wear traditional clothing like sari and salwar-kameez and do not speak English, which severely restricts their access to the city. They often do not possess the skills and knowledge, such as navigating public transport and reading maps, required to enjoy access to and belonging in public spaces. Thus, the importance of a space that makes them feel at home, on their own terms, cannot be overstated.

The beauty salon, then, exceeds its functionality and becomes a communal living room where women can feel a sense of privacy, intimacy and sociality, even when not making use of one of the services on offer. In that regard, salon owners such as Noor and Anita enjoy an unusual opportunity to domesticate a semi-public space that they have full control over, for themselves and for other migrant women. Practices of homemaking, thus, allow migrant women to co-produce an informal space where they can share leisure time, gossip and mutual help (Boccagni & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2023). As Floya Anthias (2013:8) writes, 'belonging "to" something is always linked to belonging "with" certain others who also occupy the realm of belonging to that something'. I have shown how this belonging 'with' excludes clients who do not deal in the same registers of intimacy. I will further tease out the particularities of belonging 'with' as it plays out in the South Asian beauty salon in the next chapter.

Chapter 7 - Religious Intimacy: Belonging, Boundary-work and the Intimate Other in the South Asian Beauty Salon

7.1. Introduction: What's religion doing in a beauty salon?

In the previous chapter, we saw how homemaking practices produce ethnic intimacy in the South Asian beauty salon. The home, however, is also a 'symbolic boundary-marker for collective categorization and mobilization, often with an exclusionary subtext' (Boccagni & Duyvendak, 2021:2). Feeling at home in an extra-domestic space is not simply a matter of personal preference. It also depends on the preferences and practices of others who occupy the same space. Thus, homemaking is a deeply relational practice, in that feeling at home may derive from 'the comforting realization of others' absence' (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004: 459). Thus, homemaking is always already a political question as homemaking for some is tied up with the unmaking of home for others (Boccagni & Duyvendak, 2021). The aim of this chapter is to show how this homemaking and unmaking unfold across religious lines in the South Asian beauty salon.

When we speak of a diaspora space for South Asians, we can hardly understand such a space as a neutral or secular one devoid of religious markers. Surprising as it may seem, a study of beauty salons can easily find itself enmeshed in the politics of religion. Religion has become one of the most powerful vectors of identity formation in the diaspora instead of the nation-state (McAlister, 2005). One of the reasons identified for the prominence of religion in the lives of migrants is that it helps them survive social and cultural marginalisation by providing a locus of stability and of community formation. Religion proves to be particularly meaningful in the face of the social instability or downward mobility facing migrants by providing the tools for meaning-making and identity formation (Kim, 2011). Religion grounds people by helping them figure out who they are. The fear of losing their identity, tradition and values in the face of what they perceive to be Western materialism, permissiveness and immorality -- especially in relation to the impact of Western culture on their children -- also drives migrants towards religion and religiosity (Bhatt, 2000). Therefore, in the early stages of migration and diasporic formation, the development of religious institutions becomes central to migrant concerns. As religious spaces become the sites of community formation in the diaspora, different religious communities become ever more distant from each other as their members have fewer opportunities to interact. Mosques and temples are 'no longer mere spaces of

prayer; they become major spaces of socialization' (Mohammad-Arif, 2007: 3). Both Prema Kurien (2021) and Amina Mohammad-Arif (2007) have made this point regarding Hindus and Muslims from India in the USA – that individuals not only have fewer opportunities to meet religious others than they would in their country of origin but that they also start interacting primarily with individuals from their own religious background.

In the UK, religion has always acted as a marker of community identity in the South Asian diaspora (Rai & Sankaran, 2011). In a globalised world where communication technology has reduced the distance between the diaspora and home communities and religious teachers have become much more mobile, the awareness of religious identities has only increased. This has made religion central to identity and community formation for South Asian migrants in the UK. In addition to representing communities, temples, mosques and other places of worship in the UK have acted as intermediaries between the government and civic bodies, on the one hand, and ethnic minorities deemed hard to access, on the other (Knott, 2009). As a result, there has been a move from considering Asian/South Asian as an ethnic identity towards perceiving Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs as separate ethnic groups (Zavos, 2015). This is partly due to the way ethnic identification has shifted as migrant communities have become more settled, but it also reflects how the British state has tried to manage ethnic plurality - a shift from multiculturalism to 'multi-faithism' (Patel & Siddiqui, 2010: 102). Multi-faithism captures how religion has become a 'structuring principle for both welfare provision and community organising' in the UK through both the New Labour and the Conservative governments' acknowledgement of religious organisations, including the religious right, as representatives and mediators of ethnic minority rights (Dhaliwal & Patel, 2012: 173).

It is against this backdrop that I argue that the South Asian beauty salon – which I described as a space of ethnic intimacy in the previous chapter – is also a space of religious intimacy. While it is easy to think of a mosque or a temple as sacred and streets and workplaces as secular, spaces are often multivalent with sacred and secular meanings simultaneously invested in them (Kong, 2001). Space is always socially produced as part of material culture (Lefebvre, 1991). If one were to, then, create a taxonomy of beauty salons for heuristic purposes, it would look something like this: a secular salon would be one which aims to create the impression of a neutral space using uncluttered design, minimal aesthetics and white or cream walls (Chugh & Hancock, 2009). This might remind readers of typically high-end hair and beauty salons in London: they may be redolent of many things, but

religion is unlikely to be one of them. In a secular salon, professionally trained beauticians refrain from talking about religion, sex or politics (Sharma & Black, 2001).

The South Asian salon, on the other hand, does not shy away from modifying space to display overt symbols of religion. Objects or artifacts of diaspora aesthetics displayed in such a salon are often religious in nature. In a religious salon, the diaspora reappropriates secular spatial relationships by occupying the place with sound, colour, movement and religious rituals (David, 2012). Conversations in such a salon are also peppered with talk about religion - as though people have learned to 'speak religion' as one of their dialects (Ammerman, 2014: 200). In reality, however, even this kind of salon is a secular workplace which is simultaneously sacred without actors who inhabit that space understanding these two qualities as polar opposites. In a religious beauty salon, everyday life is seamlessly integrated with religion such that religion appears mere 'common sense'. Here, I focus on experiences of 'lived' religion: how religion shapes everyday lives, conversations and practices (Kurien, 2021).

Keeping this classification in mind, I illustrate in the following sections how Anita's Hair & Beauty and Noor's Hair & Beauty were produced as Hindu and Muslim spaces respectively. In so doing, I endeavour to make visible the diaspora aesthetics, values, processes and social relations that produced the space as religious in both cases. By demonstrating that women who shared the same religious beliefs experienced intimacy and belonging in the religious salon, I argue that the logic of community-making in the larger South Asian diaspora also seeped into the neighbourhood beauty salon. The process of religious belonging also created the category of the Other – the one who did not belong. Besides the absolute Other who was an irreconcilable outsider, there was also an intimate other in the beauty salon. As religious intimacy is intolerant of heterogeneity and difference, the intimate other was part of the 'we' and yet deemed an outsider. In what follows, I will demonstrate how the categories of the Other and the intimate other were produced at Noor's Hair & Beauty and Anita's Hair & Beauty. Overall, the aim of the chapter is to illustrate that ethnic intimacy in the beauty salon was, on many occasions, coterminous with religious intimacy.

7.2. Anita's Hair & Beauty as a Hindu space

7.2.1. The role of symbols, rituals and conversations

Sacred space is constructed through the 'cultural labor of ritual' (Smith, 1978: 88). At Anita's Hair & Beauty, a totem made of a lemon and seven green chillies tied together, meant to ward off the evil eye of competitors, hung by a thread at the entrance of the salon. Inside, a small altar fixed to the corner of a wall housed tiny figurines of Hindu deities such as Ram, Sita and Ganesh. Hinduism is a non-congregational religion in which sacredness can be manifested by 'formal and sensory elements of deity care' in home or shop altars that bind the deity and the devotee in a relationship of 'efficacious intimacy' (Mohan, 2020: 154). After opening the salon at about 10 am, Anita lit a lamp at the altar. She also burnt incense sticks and rotated them in clockwise direction in a purification ritual ensuring that the smoke reached every corner of the salon. Then she played devotional songs on her phone for the first hour before turning on the radio. While I discussed the power of Bollywood songs to create ethnic intimacy in the previous chapter, for anyone who visited the salon in the first hour, it might have felt like a sacred Hindu space suffused with the sounds of devotional music and the smoke of incense sticks. Symbols such as the altar and the incense sticks create a physical and cultural landscape that help to 'alleviate cultural stress' and validate 'social claims to space and time' (Lunden, 2011: 11). It is through these religious symbols and rituals that Anita made the space of the salon her own. In doing so, however, she also opened up a reading of her salon as a Hindu space.

The salon got busy during Hindu festivals such as Navaratri, Diwali, Karwa Chauth and Hartalika Teej, celebrated both in India and Nepal. On the eve of Karwa Chauth, a Hindu festival for married women to fast for the longevity of their husbands, the salon used to be animated by the chatter of young women getting henna designs on their palms and joking about whether their husbands will reciprocate their fasts or not. During Navaratri, a nine-day Hindu festival celebrating Goddess Durga, the salon became even more markedly Hindu due to its proximity to the local temple. The temple acted as the locus of all Hindu festivities in the area and some of this festive spirit got carried over to the salon as well. Women came to get their eyebrows done quickly while waiting for the *aarti* (a ritual of worship) to begin, discussed the *garba* (ritual dance) timings, or shared their fast diets and stories. They came to the salon to get their hair done before joining the festivities. On Hartalika Teej, a Hindu women's festival celebrated in India and Nepal, Anita joined a group of Nepali women

in the temple -- all dressed in red saris -- in their ritual dance and celebrations. She excitedly showed me pictures of herself dressed in a red sari given by her mother-in-law. This was the only occasion when she made time to socialise with the Nepali community in London. She joined in because she felt nostalgic about how women used to get together to celebrate Hartalika Teej in Nepal.

Very often, the first thing a client mentioned upon learning of Anita's Nepali origins were the famous Hindu temples of Nepal. Nepal was the only modern state with Hinduism as a state religion until the monarchy was abolished in favour of a secular democratic republic in 2007 (Verma Williams & Moktan, 2019). Religious Hindu women did not have to make much effort to participate in the atmosphere or the conversations at Anita's Hair & Beauty. Lived religion can be understood by looking at sites where conversation produces and is produced by the religious realities assumed by participants of the conversation (Ammerman, 2014). The vignette below demonstrates one such 'religious' conversation.

A woman in her 50s, dressed in a pair of loose trousers and top, came to get her hair dyed. Her name was Hiral and she ran a post office in London. She warmed up to Anita immediately on learning that she was from Nepal. 'My best friend is from Nepal as well,' she said, demonstrating her knowledge of the country by bringing up the diverse racial and cultural backgrounds of its people. 'I would love to visit the Pashupatinath temple with my friend once the pandemic is over,' she beamed, referring to a famous Shiv temple in Kathmandu, Nepal's capital city. Anita responded enthusiastically as she was always happy to talk about Nepal. Their conversation was in English.

My curiosity piqued by her discussion of Hinduism and Hindu temples in India and Nepal, I initiated a conversation with Hiral after introducing my research. 'Where are you from?' I asked. Of Gujarati origin, she said that she was the third generation in her family to be born in Ethiopia. She then migrated to England as a child. With such an interesting background, how did she identify herself, I asked, expecting a narrative of ambiguity and/or hybridity.

> On papers, I am British-Asian of course, but I am Indian. Our mother never let us forget who we were and where we came from. She cooked Gujarati food at home, we watched Bollywood films, and no matter what language we spoke outside we had to speak Gujarati at home. It is important never to forget who one is. I am Indian.

While Gujarati cuisine and language combined with Bollywood films represent South Asian diasporic aesthetics, they also show the blurring of boundaries between religious, ethnic and national identities. Despite never having lived in India, Hiral staked a claim to 'Indian' identity through her Gujarati ethnic heritage. At the same time, in her answer, there was no acknowledgment of Ethiopia where three generations of her family were born and raised. In her worldview, one could only identify as belonging to one place rather than embodying multiple identities. This echoed the findings of Hasmita Ramji's (2006: 716) research with British Gujarati women wherein she noted 'knowing who we are' to be a common trope. The Gujarati diaspora from Africa took pride in how they had retained their traditions and values such as knowledge of Gujarati language, religiosity and vegetarianism.

A similar pattern was reflected in Hiral's answer. Not only did she identify herself, vociferously, as Indian, but also conflated being Indian with being Hindu as our conversation progressed.

After mentioning all the places she had been to in India (mostly Hindu pilgrimages), she added that the next on her list of places to visit was the Ram temple in Ayodhya. 'It's in Varanasi, right?' she asked, her knowledge of India's geography coterminous with that of Hindu temples. 'No, but it's close by,' I answered. Whilst her hair was being dyed, her conversation with Anita revolved entirely around Hindu temples, occasionally interrupted by my questions.

'I'm curious about why you mentioned the Ram temple,' I said, a few minutes later.

> Hiral: Because it's the temple of Lord Ram? If you were Catholic, you would want to go to the Vatican, right? What Vatican is to them, Ayodhya is to Hindus …With all the religious discourse one has heard around it, one wants to go there.

Hiral's use of the word 'discourse' was intriguing but also indicated that she was well aware of the politics surrounding the Ram temple under construction at the time on the site where Babri mosque was demolished in 1992, fanning Hindu-Muslim tensions and leading to country-wide riots in India. Hindu nationalists believed Ayodhya to be the birthplace of Ram and claimed that the first Mughal emperor Babur had built the mosque over the ruins of a temple dedicated to Ram. Scholars are of the view that the destruction of the Babri mosque was a watershed moment in the consolidation of the Hindu nationalist movement in India and its diaspora, awakening militant religiosity amongst

Hindus across the world (Sahgal, 2020). The politicisation of the Ayodhya dispute was also a pivotal event around which right-wing Hindu organisations tried to foster a collective Hindu identity in the UK (Zavos, 2010).

In 2019, the Supreme Court of India allowed for a temple to be built on the controversial site, whilst acquitting all those implicated in the demolition of the mosque, signalling a victory for Hindu nationalist forces under the prime ministership of Narendra Modi. It is important to unpack the politics behind what could be taken for a simple expression of religiosity because, as the historical context indicates, it is predicated on the rise of Hindu nationalism and exclusion of Muslims. The development of Hindu identity in the UK too cannot be separated from the vilification of Muslims both in India and Britain. While the former predates the formation of India as a nation, the vilification of Muslims in the UK is based on a rhetoric of 'the problematic quality of Muslim migrant communities in Britain, and the dangers of appeasement in an atmosphere of multiculturalism' (Zavos, 2010: 12).

This vignette, then, exemplifies how the production of Anita's Hair & Beauty as a Hindu space through 'religious' conversation cannot be taken at face value but must be analysed in the broader socio-political context in which it occurs -- one that foregrounds the rise of Hindu nationalism in India, premised on the exclusion of Muslims and Christians, and the simultaneous consolidation of Hindu identity in the UK.

7.2.2. The Muslim Other

Walking down the passage from the street to Anita's Hair & Beauty late one morning, I smelt the strong chemicals used for hair straightening. As it was only two hours past opening time, someone had come in early to get their hair straightened. Fatema, a young girl wearing loose tracksuit pants and an oversized shirt sat on the salon chair patiently whilst strands of her hair were being pressed tightly with a hot iron. She was accompanied by her maternal aunt, Munira, who was only a few years older than her. Dressed in a grey burqa, Munira was acting as chaperone to her niece, having brought her to the salon where she got her own hair straightened. Munira, who had arrived in England from Bangladesh five years ago, asked questions in Sylheti to which Fatema, born and raised in London, replied in English. The aunt and the niece seemed quite fond of each other. They had left home at seven in the morning to start the hair straightening process at nine, Anita informed me. It

was past noon now. They had to be hungry. 'Feel free to go out and eat something if you like,' Anita told them. 'Do you want something to eat?' Munira asked her niece in Sylheti. 'What are the options?' Fatema asked back in English. 'There is no chicken here, only vegetarian food,' Munira explained. Fatema scrunched her nose and shook her head, clearly displeased with the (lack of) options. Eager to demonstrate my knowledge of the street, I chimed in with a suggestion: a shop just a few doors down where I usually bought delicious savouries. 'I know that shop,' Munira said with a smile. 'I once went there and asked the woman behind the counter if they had any savouries with chicken. The woman was livid. "Don't you know everything is vegetarian here?"' - the vivacious Munira mimicked the angry woman behind the counter, as though to say that it still eluded her what about her seemingly innocuous query had been so offensive. Munira and Fatema decided that they would wait and eat at home later.

It dawned on me that I took it for granted that all the eateries in the vicinity of the temple, mostly owned by Gujaratis, sold only vegetarian food. It was a politics of exclusion that created a sense of unbelonging for most non-Hindus. That religious Hindus did not consume meat was constructed as a kind of common sense that everyone, irrespective of their beliefs, was supposed to share and respect. The sacredness of the temple spilled over into the street and from the street, into the salon. As Daniel Trudeau (2006) argues, places codify membership by normalising certain values and ways of seeing the world. The groups or characteristics that do not belong in this place are simply not represented, leading to exclusion. The street on which Anita's Hair & Beauty was located excluded non-Hindus not through any specific act of exclusion but simply by presenting Hindu religiosity as the dominant value. As a result, not many Muslim women ended up coming either to the street or to the salon. Those who did come to the salon evoked curiosity. Being Muslim did not pass unmarked, as natural and unremarkable, whereas being Hindu simply seemed a matter of common-sense.

When the aunt and the niece were about to leave, an interesting scene ensued. Fatema stood facing the mirror, struggling with her headscarf. After treatment, hair must be kept as straight as possible for the next three days, so that the restructured bonds in the hair cells do not revert to their original configuration. Tying a headscarf tightly could be a problem, so Munira advised that Fatema cover her head lightly with her scarf instead of wrapping it tight. Accustomed to a headscarf, Fatima was discomfited by the demands of her new hairstyle. Anita and the other beauticians eyed her with

extreme curiosity. 'Do you wear a burqa even at home?' Anita, inquisitive as ever, was quick to ask. 'No, at home we are just like you,' Munira answered, as she was the one in a burqa. 'But only your husband can see your hair?' came Anita's next question, pat. 'A woman's father, brother and husband can see her hair,' Munira calmly responded. 'So we cover our head with a headscarf or wear a burqa only when going out.'

This exchange, underpinned not by hostility but curiosity, still managed to drive home the point that a Muslim headscarf-wearing body was something of an oddity, something that needed to be remarked upon and wrestled with, even if it had been encountered before. This was in sharp contrast to Hindu norms that were taken for granted. Hindu women in the South Asian diaspora, moreover, often construct their own identity as being more 'progressive' than that of Muslim women. After Munira and Fatema left, a discussion ensued on guessing Fatema's age, with beauticians passing comments such as '*they* get married early' or '*they* are not allowed to work outside the home', as Munira had revealed that Fatema was getting married in a few days.

Iris Marion Young (1990: 98) has argued that difference is not 'absolute otherness' or a complete absence of shared attributes. These ambiguities, however, must be papered over in order to generate stable categories of identity that result in an 'us' and 'them'. Similarly, Oscar Thomas-Olalde and Astride Velho (2011) also argue that foreignness and familiarity are constitutive of each other. The foreigner or the other is never a foreigner in the real sense of the word but is an intimate familiar instead. This intimate familiar is characterised by "knowing" them – which is defined as knowing everything essential about them that reduces the other to an 'epistemic minimum' (Thomas-Olalde & Velho, 2011: 36). The Muslim woman was also reduced to such as epistemic minimum by what the Hindu woman claimed to know about her – that she must cover her head, get married at an early age and not work outside the home.

An unusually high number of Muslim women came to Anita's Hair & Beauty just before Eid when they wanted to get their eyebrows done and hands henna-ed.

It was the day before Eid in 2021 and the salon was animated by the chatter of Gujarati aunties, bemoaning hairfall, asking when the Hindu temple in the neighbourhood would be allowed to open after the lockdown. 'The Sri Lankan temple is now open, why has the Sanatan one not opened yet?' asked one of the aunties. As she waited for a hair wash after getting her hair dyed, two burqa-clad

women entered the salon. 'It is Eid tomorrow, that's why they are here,' the Gujarati aunty murmured, to no one in particular. She kept her distance, careful not to let her body come into close contact with theirs in the tiny salon.

The salon workers had no language in common with the two Muslim clients, who were probably Pashto or Farsi speakers. Beautician Bharti threaded their eyebrows, managing in broken English and through hand gestures. As they were about to leave, Sunrise Radio played the *azaan,* the Islamic call to prayer recited by a *muezzin* at set times of the day. Surprised, the women looked for the source of the sound. '*Adhan* (Arabic)! You Muslim?' one of the women exclaimed. It was playing on the radio, Anita pointed out. 'But we celebrate all festivals. *Eid Mubarak*!' she added. *'Eid Mubarak*!' the two women left with a smile on their faces, a rare moment of interreligious conviviality at Anita's salon.

Shortly thereafter, Rubina, a regular client of the salon who was Muslim, walked in. Whilst Bharti was threading her eyebrows, Rubina asked her if she knew about the lynching of Muslims in India under a Hindu fundamentalist regime. 'I don't think that's true,' Bharti mumbled tentatively, reluctant to engage in conversation on such a thorny topic. Rubina, however, was not only fiercely opinionated but also eager to find an audience for her opinions. 'Why is it that Hindus and Muslims live peacefully in this country but bay for each other's blood in their home countries?' she posed a rhetorical question which she then answered herself. 'Because we are afraid that the *gorey* [whites] will chase us out of here. Hindus celebrate Christmas here, so do Muslims. Everyone likes to eat good food on Christmas. But Hindus won't celebrate Eid and Muslims won't celebrate Diwali? Why? I say the whites must chase us all out,' she went on, unprovoked. Bharti did not contribute, nor did she contradict Rubina. I do not recall how and why Rubina had started down this route. It was certainly not anything that Bharti had said. Rubina was not speaking to Bharti alone, in any case. She was speaking to a captive audience of women, mostly Hindu Gujarati, present in the salon. The Gujarati aunties were visibly uncomfortable. They shared looks without saying anything, even though Rubina's jibe was strategically and broadly aimed at the mutual intolerance between Hindus and Muslims from the Indian subcontinent.

'*Eid Mubarak*, aunty!' Sunita wished Rubina as she left after an extremely tense fifteen minutes.

Not only was a visibly Muslim body out-of-place in Anita's salon, but it could also disturb the status quo by invoking ongoing tensions between Hindus and Muslims, a topic that Hindu beauticians and clients preferred to avoid. There seemed to be a tendency at this salon to avoid complicated topics instead of engaging in lively debates, as was more often the response at Noor's.

To be clear, my aim here is not to dwell upon individuals and their attitudes. Whilst I witnessed tense encounters between Islamophobic salon workers and Muslim clients, I also saw how relationships that started with mistrust went on to become friendly as common grounds were discovered with prolonged contact -- for instance, when a discussion began between a Gujarati Hindu beautician and a Pakistani Muslim woman about how acrimonious cricket matches between India and Pakistan did not reflect the sentiments of common people on either side of the border. Anita herself was curious about and respectful towards all religions. I saw her establish camaraderie with clients irrespective of their religion. A few Gujarati Muslims living in the area along with a couple of Pakistani Muslim women such as Rubina were regulars at the salon. When the South Asian radio channel played the azaan every afternoon during the month of Ramzan, a sonic rupture was produced in my reading of Anita's Hair & Beauty as a Hindu space. Once, as the azaan was on, Anita turned to me and said, 'I don't understand its meaning but it gives me great peace.'

While interpersonal attitudes towards different faiths can indeed be complex, what I wish to focus on here is how the production of a beauty salon as a Hindu space might have created an atmosphere where Muslims felt excluded or where anti-Muslim remarks were casually voiced, or where the passing of an Islamophobic comment went completely unnoticed. Individuals felt emboldened to make such comments because they thought that others shared their sentiments. Thus, the politics of belonging constructs 'material and discursive boundaries' that appear stable while visually communicating who belongs and who does not belong in a space (Trudeau, 2006: 422).

One day, a middle-aged Punjabi Hindu woman was getting her hair dyed. She spoke English with a strong English accent whilst her Hindustani was laced with a Punjabi inflection, demonstrating that she was either second generation or had come to the UK at a very young age. As she was anxious about getting a parking ticket for her car, she said that she would wash her hair at home by herself. Anita wrapped her head in black plastic to prevent the dye from staining her clothes. After it was done, the woman examined herself in the mirror awhile. 'It looks like I am wearing a hijab,' she

muttered to herself in Punjabi. 'The police will laugh if I get stopped by them,' she switched to English. All the beauticians were busy, so I felt compelled to respond. 'Why might you get stopped by the police?' I asked. 'If they think I am wearing a hijab, they might stop me. Say I am a Muslim,' she said. I wondered how a Muslim woman might have felt on overhearing this casual conversation.

In the UK, insisting on one's Hindu identity has also taken on added significance after events such as 9/11 in the US and the July 7 bombings in London (Mohammad-Arif, 2007). Hindus have tried to portray themselves as hard-working, law-abiding and economically successful in contrast to Muslims (Bhatt, 2000). John Zavos (2010) goes so far as to argue that the stereotypical representation of the extremist, segregationist Muslim is essential for the construction of Hindu identity as middle-class and integrationist. Hindus in the UK are also keen to differentiate themselves from Muslims as religious boundaries can also act as 'metonymic class boundaries' between the two communities (Bhatt, 2000: 564). Economically successful Hindu groups such as the East African Gujarati merchant communities are anxious not to be lumped together with impoverished Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims, two of the most disadvantaged communities in Britain in terms of educational attainment and labour market participation. Thus, a Hindu identity in Britain is formed in opposition to Muslim identity, by signalling class status and moral superiority. Dhooleka Sarhadi Raj (2000) provides an illustrative example of Hindu identity construction through a talk entitled 'Who the hell do you think you are?' delivered by a young Gujarati Hindu man at many UK university campuses between 1994 and 1995. The talk aimed to establish the primacy of the Hindu religious identity over other secular labels such as Asian or Indian. While addressing a group of students at University College London, the speaker said:

> ..Also, if we look throughout Britain, Hindus have been a boon to this country not a burden. If you look through the achievements of our accountants, our doctors, our businesses we come up on top of the table and therefore we should make it clear to these people that yes, we are British and yes, we are making a very active contribution.

In emphasising a successful Hindu identity which is 'borne out by statistics and media reports', the speaker was not only marking out Hindus as a religious group different from Muslims, but also demarcating middle-class Hindus from working-class Muslims from Pakistan and Bangladesh (Sarhadi Raj, 2000: 546).

This tendency of Hindu migrants to differentiate themselves from Muslim migrants was, as I have shown, also evident at Anita's Hair & Beauty. More importantly, I have also shown how everyday religion created Anita's salon as a Hindu space where Hindu women felt an effortless sense of belonging. It was clear in Anita's answer when I asked her why her salon received fewer Muslim clients than Hindus:

> Anita: They [Muslim women] come once or twice, but they are not able to talk openly. The first thing clients ask me is whether I am Hindu or Buddhist. When I tell them I am Hindu, the Hindu clients talk more freely – about Gods and temples, festivals and feasts.

7.2.3. The intimate other or the differently similar

In this section, I turn my attention to the 'other' who, while not so distant, is still constructed as undesirable. In other words, I look at how boundaries are created within religious communities, to avoid giving the impression that intimate communities based on religion are homogeneous and without conflict. Difference exists not only between but also within communities. Hindus as well as Muslims, far from being two internally homogeneous groups, are highly fragmented along sectarian, regional, caste-based, linguistic, socio-economic and other fault lines (Mohammad-Arif, 2007). However, there is an 'intolerance of difference' within a community, as the idea of community rests on a desire for sameness (Kong, 2001: 222). The 'logic of identity' rests on a 'totalizing system' that reduces things to a 'single formula' that is common to all things that belong to a category (Young, 1990: 98). Thus, what is 'differently similar' is reduced to 'same' so that it can stand in opposition to the 'other' which is nothing but 'merely different' as discussed in the previous section (*ibid.*: 99). Religious community building, thus, requires a great deal of homogenising that is often initiated by dominant groups.

During the early days of my fieldwork, a Gujarati mother and daughter came to Anita's Hair & Beauty. While the mother got her hair dyed, the daughter chatted with me about the beauty products she used and how important it was to her that they be vegan and not tested on animals. Her mother was taken to the wash basin to wash the dye off her hair. At an arm's length from her, on the other side of a closed curtain, Anita warmed up her lunch in the microwave. The woman let out a performative cough indicating that she was perturbed by the smell of food. Beautician Rekha said to Anita in jest: 'Hey, what are you eating? We can smell it here'. 'She is having a milkshake,' she turned

to the coughing woman, in a feeble attempt to placate her. Her eyes watering, the woman was coughing incessantly by now. '*Khabar che* (I know). I know what she is eating,' she remarked sardonically. The whole incident did not make much sense to me until Anita stepped out from behind the curtain to say, 'Auntie, I wasn't having meat, it was only vegetable soup'.

I later learnt that it was common for upper-caste vegetarian Gujaratis, mainly belonging to the Swaminarayan sect, to act as though they were disgusted at the smell of meat wafting in from the annexe where the beauticians had lunch. They not only performed disgust but also voiced their disapproval of meat consumption aloud. Pointing out this exaggerated performance of disgust, Ritu, a beautician at the salon who came from a family of fisher-folks in Gujarat, said:

> They react excessively here, even more than they do in India. And then they go to the GP complaining of deficiencies and get prescribed pills with fish oil. So? Isn't it the same?

Rachel Dwyer (2004) has shown how the Swaminarayan sect, with an exclusively Gujarati membership, has come to be the dominant form of Hinduism in the UK. The features of this sect include its reinforcement of an orthodox Hindu identity through adherence to canonical scriptures and strict enforcement of upper-caste practices such as vegetarianism, teetotalism, abstaining from smoking and sex segregation (2004: 193). Writing about the caste-gender puritanism of the Swaminarayan sect, Chetan Bhatt (2000: 564) terms it a 'historic process of Gujarati migrant caste reorganization' that 'does not make sense outside of the context of migration, economic and social globalization and religious resurgence'.

Any dominant group tends to advance a 'rhetoric of sameness' to create belonging which means that for a person to belong, they must assimilate to the values of the dominant group (Antonsich, 2010: 650). At Anita's Hair & Beauty, dominant caste groups exerted social control through wanting to purify and regulate the space through discouraging the consumption of meat. It was ironic that even the owner of the salon, Anita, was unable to escape these kinds of attempts to regulate the space that belonged to her. This was, however, not incidental. Anita belonged to a caste that was, by her own admission, low in the caste hierarchy in Nepal. (In my conversations with other beauty salon owners in India and in the UK, I found out that many of them belonged to the occupational caste of barbers, classified as a 'backward' caste in India. As men of this caste were barbers, it was seen as a natural progression for the women to work as beauticians). The packed lunch that Anita – a member of a

meat-eating caste - brought from home consisted of chicken or fish or, occasionally, lamb. Although she was careful to close the curtain when she ate in the annexe, preventing clients from seeing her food, it was hard not to notice the smell pervading the small and cramped salon. This often put the salon owner in a position of conflict with the vegetarian Gujaratis who formed a large part of her clientele. Clients came and went, but the conflict was sharper when a fellow beautician disapproved of Anita's food choices. Sonali, who worked in the salon three days a week, was a vegetarian Gujarati (albeit not from the Swaminarayan sect) who, without fail, expressed her discontent at lunchtime. This also shows that belief in one's own cultural practice or habit as superior is powerful enough to manifest even in an employee-employer relationship, posing a challenge to the conventional hierarchy in that relationship.

One day while I was at the salon, Anita invited me to share lunch with her -- bread and fish curry. She was aware that Sonali would complain about the smell once we started eating and, sure enough, Sonali frowned. 'Please don't eat "non-veg" here in the salon,' she pleaded. 'Okay darling, then you bring lunch for me,' said Anita, making light of the matter in her trademark manner. 'I will bring lunch for you but I come here only three days a week,' Sonali retorted. 'Okay, rest of the days I will eat meat,' said Anita. 'No, you won't eat meat even on those days. It is not good to eat meat in the salon in front of customers. Everyone can smell it,' said Sonali. 'Okay darling, I will do as you say. I know you don't like the smell of non-veg food,' Anita conceded. Thus, even though Sonali was an employee at Anita's salon, she exercised moral superiority over Anita by condemning food habits that she saw as inferior and 'unprofessional'. On another occasion, Sonali frowned upon a Muslim customer bringing raw eggs to the salon to mix with her henna in order to condition her hair. When Anita joked that Sonali needed to learn how to break eggs as part of beauty work, Sonali scrunched her nose and moved away from the area where Anita was whisking the eggs into the henna powder. In this case, it was much less about 'professionalism' and more about the presence of objects and smells in the salon that Sonali found repugnant.

I was curious to see whether Sonali would indeed start bringing lunch for Anita and whether Anita would stop consuming meat and fish. What I found instead was that a couple of weeks after this incident, Sonali had quit. Although the official reason given by her was that she was offered a position at the beauty salon where she worked before having a baby, I wondered to what degree her decision was influenced by her discontent with eggs and meat at the salon.

Caste was rarely ever invoked in the salon directly except by Anita, who loved to tell the story of how she had eloped with her husband, then boyfriend, as she belonged to a lower caste and his family would not have accepted her. It was presented as a reflection on Nepal, on how prevalent the caste system was in her country. The Indian beauticians acted surprised, relegating caste to ancient history in their country, refusing to see how caste organised their own lives.

The principle of purity and pollution underpinning the caste system also extended to menstruating women. All bodily excretions are deemed to be polluting, restricting Hindu women from participating in normal life during menstruation (Garg & Anand, 2015). During Navaratri, the nine-day Hindu festival celebrating Goddess Durga and the divine feminine, I witnessed a Gujarati woman refusing to be touched by Bharati who volunteered the information that she was on her period, anticipating that the client would not want to be touched by her as she might be deemed 'impure'. Such incidents, that might have seemed common sense to Hindus, passed without any eyebrows being raised in the salon.

Thus, I have shown how boundaries are erected between members of the same community in everyday life, thereby othering them. As ironic as it may sound, at Anita's Hair & Beauty, this intimate other was often the salon owner Anita who was Hindu but not upper caste, as her food habits were frowned upon by upper-caste beauticians and clients alike. It becomes clear how food, which acts as a register of intimacy between South Asian women can also be instrumentalised to 'other' both Muslim women and marginalised-caste Hindu women, showing how little tolerance there is for difference within religious-based diasporic communities.

7.3. Noor's Hair & Beauty as a Muslim space

7.3.1. The role of symbols, rituals and conversations

A hardbound copy of the Quran was kept behind the reception at Noor's Hair & Beauty. Noor could be seen turning the pages, reading Quranic verses, when there were no customers in the salon. The walls of the salon were adorned with *kalma* and *ayats* (verses from the Quran) in Arabic. There was also a prayer mat in the massage room where Noor and other beauticians offered prayers. Noor, like Anita, marked the start of her working day with a religious act: when she opened the salon, she played a recitation of the Quran on her phone before switching to Bollywood songs. If we take

Bollywood songs to be secular, then it can be said that in both the salons, the space was first purified by filling it with 'auspicious and godly sounds' before these were replaced by popular and secular music (David, 2012: 457).

The Muslim nature of Noor's Hair & Beauty was never more evident than in the holy month of Ramzan. Beauticians offered prayers in the massage room, sometimes joined by a client who happened to be in the salon at the time prescribed for prayers. Clients and beauticians often broke their fast together in the salon. While it was common for clients to bring food to the salon, it became even more prevalent in the month of Ramzan when they routinely came bearing food for Noor and the other Muslim beauticians to break their fast in the evening.

When practising Muslim women came to the salon, the bonding between them and the beauticians was effortless and instantaneous. The Islamic pilgrimages of Haj and Umra and the concepts of obligatory and voluntary charity in Islam were common topics of conversation. This is not to say that the beauticians' interests were limited to religion -- there were also vigorous political discussions in the salon -- but less effort was required to find common topics of interest when both parties were practising Muslim women. For example, when a South Asian woman walked in with her latest purchase of a prayer rug, Noor and Sara launched into a series of questions. 'Where did you buy it from?' 'For how much?' 'Only twelve pounds?' 'I also want one like this.' 'It is so good, your knees and elbows don't get dark.' Their exchange exemplified people speaking religion as a dialect that other religious people could immediately understand and to which they could immediately relate, while it might have seemed relatively obscure to an outsider.

Muslim women also came to Noor's Hair & Beauty to have their demands met without judgement or need for explanation. Once, a Muslim woman in hijab came with her daughter. Both the mother and the daughter wanted haircuts and asked for a screen to shield them from public view. Noor assured them that the salon was women's only, but the woman pointed at the transparent glass windows that made her feel uncomfortable about taking off her hijab. Noor brought a wooden panel from the kitchenette and used it as a screen, shielding the woman and the girl even from the other women waiting in the salon. Women who wear Islamic clothing might not feel comfortable going to non-Muslim owned salons where their needs may neither be understood nor catered to.

The religious nature of Noor's salon was also reflected in the religious homogeneity of the staff. While Noor claimed not to use religion as a factor in recruitment, I did not come across any assistant who was not Muslim while conducting fieldwork in her salon. It might simply have been the case that non-Muslim women never approached her for work. Aside from fellow Pakistani Muslim women, Noor also had two Muslim women from Afghanistan working in her salon. While Farzaneh spoke Urdu (having learnt it from watching films), Bahar spoke Pashto and a little bit of English which made it challenging for Noor to communicate with her. It was interesting, then, that Noor hired Bahar, a Muslim woman in need of work, despite the language barrier. Muslim women were drawn to a salon owned by a fellow Muslim, in part, for practical reasons. For practising Muslims, religious practice affects many aspects of their day-to-day lives such as praying five times a day, fasting, abstaining from alcohol and pork and consuming only 'halal' meat. These forms of religious practice create 'public statement of difference' from their non-Muslim peers (Jacobson, 1997: 250). Religious Muslim women usually find it difficult to offer prayers during the day in a non-Muslim workplace. As Noor told me, she found it difficult to find a private space to offer prayers when she worked in other salons. One of the greatest benefits of owning her own salon, she said, was that she could pray whenever her 'heart desired'. Similarly, for the staff, food practices such as 'no pork' and 'halal only' could easily be adhered to in the company of fellow Muslims. It was also convenient in the month of Ramzan when everyone fasted during the day and broke their fast together in the evening.

The same reasons that created a sense of community for Muslims might have discouraged women of other faiths from visiting a salon such as Noor's as they perceived it to be a Muslim space. The overtly Muslim character of the space might have acted as a deterrent for non-Muslim women because, just as symbols create familiarity and belonging, they also define otherness. By marking out a territory as Muslim, symbols and rituals may act as physical boundaries for religious others (Lunden, 2011). However, this is not the same as 'othering'. Although Hindus are one of the religious minorities constituting four per cent of Pakistan's population, nothing that I observed at Noor's salon made me think that Hindus were constructed as Others (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2020). As a Hindu woman, I was made to feel very welcome in Noor's salon, for example, by the generous sharing of food. It was not, I think, because of my presence that no condescending remarks were made about other religions, because such a veneer would be hard to maintain for two years. In fact, I was able to have

much more critical discussions on religion (both Hinduism and Islam) at Noor's than I was able to have at Anita's Hair & Beauty. By conversing openly about religious topics, Muslim beauticians at Noor's Hair & Beauty created a sense of mutual respect and tolerance for and with non-Muslim clients.

Once, I witnessed an interaction between Noor and one of her regular clients who was Sikh. While Noor was from the Punjab province of Pakistan, Simran had come to the UK with her parents from the Indian state of Punjab when she was nine. She spoke English with a British accent. Their conversation took place in a mix of Punjabi and Urdu/Hindustani. Over the many hours that Simran spent at the salon getting a hair colour and a cut, their conversations sprawled over culture, politics and religion. Simran criticized Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his handling of the coronavirus pandemic and the farmers' protest which was largely led by Sikh farmers from Punjab. In response, Noor brought up the Kartarpur sahib gurudwara, one of the holiest sites in Sikhism which fell in the Punjab province of Pakistan after partition and had recently been opened to Indian devotees without the need for a visa. The two women discussed how politicians did not like Indians and Pakistanis coming together and tried to keep them apart. 'The people … we love each other,' they concluded. This led to a discussion of the origins of Islam and Sikhism, their values and teachings. Noor was keen to establish that all religions were equal and good in their own right but some followers at times used them to violent ends. After the beauty services were done, Simran asked if Noor wasn't going to make her a cup of coffee like she usually did. Their conversations, as though that between two close friends, carried on over a cup of coffee.

The friendliness was not a given as Sikhs and Muslims have an antagonistic past in the Indian subcontinent. While Sikhs have tried to establish themselves as different from both Muslims and Hindus, Sikh-Muslim relations are marked by the fact that communal violence that transpired before and after the Partition of India saw Sikhs and Hindus allying against Muslims (Moliner, 2007). Even though they come from the Punjab region, Muslim and Sikh Punjabis have only managed to meet each other in the diaspora. Given this background, Noor's and Simran's interaction was geared towards establishing sameness across difference and a common South Asian diasporic identity rather than one circumscribed by religion or nation-states.

7.3.2. The intimate other

At a time when Noor was desperately looking for assistant beauticians, a middle-aged woman dressed in a long tunic, slacks and a headscarf knocked on the door asking for work. Noor was in the waxing room with a client, so I spoke with this woman, Aqsa. 'Do you have training?' I asked. 'I had my own beauty salon,' she said. 'Please come inside and wait. The owner of this salon is indeed looking for a beautician,' I said to her. I informed Noor that a trained beautician had come looking for work. When Noor came out of the waxing room, she did not pay heed to Aqsa immediately. She continued working on other clients while telling Aqsa to wait – which I understood as Noor establishing a power dynamic. When Noor finally spoke to Aqsa, in the middle of cutting a girl's haircut, her tone was far from friendly. 'Do you know how to thread eyebrows?' Noor asked. 'Makeup? Hair?' Aqsa told her what she had told me earlier – that she had her own beauty salon in Cardiff which she was forced to close due to personal circumstances. Noor could check the reviews online if she wanted, she added. 'Can you come for a trial tomorrow?' Noor asked. 'Sure, but how much would you pay per hour?' Aqsa inquired, hesitantly. Noor did not answer. When the clients left, she rebuked her, 'Does one talk like that in front of clients? You come tomorrow, I will first see your work and then let you know'. Aqsa made to leave. As she was about to step out the door, Noor asked, 'Are you Ahmadiyya?' 'No, I am Sunni,' Aqsa giggled apprehensively. The air was awkward, bordering on hostile, so I was not surprised when Noor turned to me and declared, 'I don't like her'.

The following day, Aqsa came for a trial at 11 am sharp, as promised. A client came in to get her eyebrows threaded. Noor asked Aqsa to thread her eyebrows. Aqsa took off her coat and hung it on the coat rack. She proceeded towards the client. 'Do you want to take off your headscarf or keep it on?' Noor interrupted her, 'It's a ladies-only salon'. Aqsa took off her headscarf and hung it on the coat rack without any ado. 'Sanitise your hands,' Noor instructed. 'I did at home,' Aqsa answered. 'But you need to do it in front of the client,' Noor demanded, setting the tone for the rest of the trial. For the next two hours whilst I was there, Noor alternated between harshly finding faults with Aqsa's work ('I don't understand how you ran your own salon!') and mildly patronising her ('if you don't know something, ask and I will explain'). When I called her the following day to ask if she had hired Aqsa, she answered in the negative, something that I had predicted from their very first interaction.

Noor's question 'Are you Ahmadiyya?' was quite telling. Founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in Qadian, Punjab, in 1889, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community represents one of the seventy-three sects within Islam. However, the community was declared a non-Muslim minority in Pakistan in

1974 as Ahmad's claims to be the Promised Messiah angered mainstream Muslims who regard Muhammad as the last Prophet (see Raja, 2020). This led to the persecution of Ahmadiyya Muslims, who then migrated to the UK in large numbers, with their community headquarters now situated here. Their presence in the UK went hand-in-hand with the discrimination against them in the Pakistani diaspora. Marzia Balzani (2020) chronicles how a Muslim cleric gave a sermon at an Islamic Centre close to Noor's salon denouncing Ahmadis, asking Muslims to boycott their businesses and refuse to interact with them. This was shortly after an attack on Ahmadi mosques in Lahore in Pakistan. Ahmadi shopkeepers in London saw their turnover fall and Ahmadi women were refused service in restaurants. Shops on Cinnamon Road where Noor's salon was located displayed notices in Urdu that they would not serve Ahmadis, described as infidels, heretics and unbelievers (Balzani, 2020).

Noor's question 'Are you Ahmadiyya?' must be seen against this backdrop. She had often narrated to me the story of the Ahmadiyya community in great detail, stressing how she deemed them heretics. This theological bias manifested itself through othering practices driven by Noor's belief that Ahmadiyya Muslim women were dirty and not suitable to be employed in beauty salons. Her patronising attitude towards Aqsa and her insistence that she sanitise her hands and take off her headscarf showed that she considered her to be conservative and not clean. Prior to this incident, Noor had also asked a Pakistani Muslim client who looked unkempt in her eyes if she was Ahmadiyya Muslim. Thus, openness towards other religions does not preclude the othering of people with heterogeneous beliefs within one's own religion, leading to exclusion. It also shows the prevalence of boundary work within religious communities.

7.4. Conclusion

I have shown how religious actors inhabit and move through space producing it as religious, even if they do so inadvertently. Once a salon is produced as Hindu or Muslim, it offers a sense of intimacy or belonging for women sharing the same faith. The arrangement of aesthetics and social relations around religion appears normal and natural to women who share those religious beliefs, making them feel that they belong in that space. In this chapter, I have shown how Anita's Hair & Beauty and Noor's Hair & Beauty were produced as Hindu and Muslim spaces respectively through rituals, artefacts and conversations. Food also plays a significant role in creating religious intimacy. Fasting,

food avoidance and commensal consumption of food are all practices through which intimacy is created between religiously similar co-ethnics (Bailey, 2017). I have also shown how such a sense of belonging is predicated on keeping the Other out. The production of Anita's Hair & Beauty as a Hindu space did the work of marking Muslims as Others while the reverse was not discernible at Noor's Hair & Beauty. Boundaries are created not only between communities but also within them, which leads to the creation of the 'intimate other'. I have demonstrated how dominant-caste Hindus produced the meat-eating, lower-caste Hindu as the intimate other at Anita's Hair & Beauty. Similarly, the Ahmadiyya Muslim was produced as the intimate other at Noor's Hair & Beauty.

Research shows that religiosity and religious nationalism are rising in both Hindu and Muslim South Asian diasporas (Kurien, 2021). In the UK, as part of policy decisions that culminated in the 1980s, South Asian communities in the UK began to be defined by their religious affiliation (Moliner, 2007). Against this backdrop, my main finding that religion contributes to creating intimate communities in the South Asian beauty salon reinforces the salience of religion in the diaspora. It also shows how a diasporic space of any scale can begin to reflect the organisation of community on the basis of religious affinities.

It was religion that brought together, at Anita's Hair & Beauty, salon owner Anita, an economic migrant from Nepal; Hiral, a Gujarati client born in Ethiopia and raised in England; and Sudha, a regular Tamil client of Anita's who had fled the civil war in Sri Lanka. Similarly, religion was the binding force between Noor, a marriage migrant from Pakistan, and Bahar, an engineer who had fled Afghanistan when the Taliban first took over. Religion holds the explanation for why women with such wildly diverse histories of migration meet each other in the places they do. Religion, while bringing together similar kinds of people, also has the power to expand the notion of community to women who are very different in terms of life experience and nationality. In a way, then, it expands the definition of South Asian diaspora by overshadowing the boundaries of nations and redefining with whom intimacy is possible in the diaspora.

It is also important to acknowledge, however, what is lost when ethnic intimacy becomes coterminous with religious intimacy such that it shrinks the space for a secular version of South Asian intimacy. As scholars have pointed out, the bifurcation of South Asian community into religious-based communities has led to the institutionalisation of the most conservative or orthodox

of those religious identities (Moliner, 2007; Dhaliwal & Patel, 2012). This can have adverse effects on women's access to public spaces. Moreover, Pragna Patel and Hannana Siddiqui (2010: 103) have expressed concern about the shrinking of secular spaces that they call 'a necessary precondition for women's struggle for freedom in personal and public spheres' in the face of the state's approach of 'multi-faithism'. They show how 'multi-faithism' has resulted in religious-based organisations receiving the lion's share of public funding at the cost of secular women's organisations such as Southall Black Sisters (Patel & Siddiqui, 2010). Secular spaces for women are important because in such spaces, women from various national, ethnic and religious backgrounds learn to coexist by tolerating religious and cultural differences and at the same time challenging those religious and cultural practices that constrain their lives (Dhaliwal & Patel, 2012). Such an example of secular space is described by Kanwal Mand's (2006) article on an East London-based community organisation that brought together elderly South Asian women irrespective of their religious, class and migratory backgrounds. Even though women tended to form sub-groups based on religious identity, the said organisation reinforced secularism as a matter of policy, encouraging the formation of friendships between women of different faiths.

In the context of my research, moving away from a secular South Asian identity means that first-generation migrant women from South Asia have no recourse to community spaces that operate outside of the framework of religious and cultural norms. For women who feel oppressed by religion or whose lives do not measure up to the standards of religious morality, this could mean exclusion from diasporic spaces of intimacy. When diasporic spaces are segregated by religion, it also means that women have fewer opportunities to get to know and understand the 'other' and build mutual tolerance and respect, leading to the reification and strengthening of religious boundaries in the diaspora.

Chapter 8 - Contingent Intimacy: Race and Commerce in the South Asian Beauty Salon

8.1. Introduction

One busy afternoon, Jin, an Asian woman, walked into Anita's Hair & Beauty. Although she had called earlier to book an appointment, she took a seat and patiently waited her turn. 'My kids are waiting at home,' another woman who had been waiting for a while apologised to Jin. 'No problem, I am not in a rush,' said Jin. As she was waiting, she looked around the salon with amusement. Fifteen minutes later, Harsha ushered her to the salon chair and began removing hair from her face with a thread. Unable to contain her curiosity, salon owner Anita, who was serving a Gujarati client on the next chair, asked Jin in English, 'Where are you from, darling?' 'Taiwan,' Jin answered. 'Very nice skin,' Anita complimented her, before adding, 'I thought you are from Japan'. Anita then went on to tell the Gujarati client she was working on in Hindi how she was often mistaken for Japanese or Chinese herself. The client responded that it must be on account of her small eyes. Thereafter, Anita narrated an incident wherein one Gujarati woman, not suspecting that Anita might understand Gujarati, had once described her to another Gujarati woman using a slang word used in India for people with Asian features.

After Harsha had threaded her face and eyebrows, Jin had to wait again for Anita to cut her hair. She and I had a little chat while she was waiting. Jin told me that she was struck by how she seemed to be the only 'yellow' person in the salon. 'How did you find this salon?' I asked her. She said that she was passing by and noticed that the neighbourhood was populated by Indians. 'I know that Indians are good at threading. If you go to a beauty salon in the city, it costs three times as much, so I came here,' she said.

When Anita started cutting Jin's hair, she asked more questions. 'What visa are you on?' 'Student visa or work visa?' Jin told her she was on a dependant's visa as she had migrated to London with her husband. Anita told Jin that the texture of Jin's hair was really similar to that of both her and her daughter's hair. Jin was happy with her haircut. She did a 'namaste' by joining her hands together as a way of thanking Anita. 'You know namaste?' Anita found it amusing. 'Yes, from yoga class,' said Jin.

This encounter at Anita's Hair & Beauty struck me as one where both parties made sense of each other through racialisation. Even before Anita asked Jin where she was from, she had already classified her as 'East Asian' in her mind, characterised by good skin and straight hair. Whether Jin was from Japan or China or Taiwan was a small detail without much relevance to her. Jin did not take offence at the curiosity of the beauticians about her origins as she was just as aware of her difference as were the others – the only 'yellow' face in a sea of 'brown' people. The way the conversation between Jin and Anita proceeded was also circumscribed by racialisation. As Jin was an East Asian migrant woman whose age and class background were difficult to guess, Anita took her to be on a student visa or a work visa whereas she assumes working-class South Asian migrants to be on dependant visas. She was also keen to establish sameness – not only did she point out that they had the same texture of hair but also that she was often mistaken for a Chinese or a Japanese person herself. Just as Anita placed a Taiwanese woman under the umbrella category of 'East Asian', her client too mistook a Nepali woman for someone from India. When Jin said that threading comes from India, Anita did not tell her that she was not Indian. When Jin thanked Anita with a 'namaste' she had learnt in yoga class, she was drawing on an Orientalist trope that further consolidated Anita's identity as an undifferentiated and generic 'Indian' standing in for all South Asians. As they made sense of each other through broad racial categories, the particulars of their origins were rendered insignificant.

While clients in a beauty salon consume racialised labour, deemed low-cost as well as authentic, they in turn are racialised by the beauticians, a process that will then determine what kind of intimacies can be established between them. Barring a few instances of racial ambiguity, a client never enters the salon unmarked; they are always already marked as *apney* [ours], *gorey* [white] or *kaley* [black].[6] By their semiotic classification as non-*apney* or those who fall outside the category of 'our people', do non-South Asian clients also fall outside the bounds of intimacy? In this chapter, I ask whether intimacy is possible between South Asian beauticians and white and black clients in the South Asian beauty salon.

6 Clients of other ethnicities, such as East Asian as depicted in the opening vignette, were rare at both Anita's Hair & Beauty and Noor's Hair & Beauty.

In demonstrating how interactions in the beauty salon are shaped by a logic of racialisation, I develop the concepts of 'attendability' and 'disattendability', borrowing from Shirley Ann Tate's original use of these concepts to refer to black and white bodies in UK academia (2014: 2481). In the South Asian beauty salon, there is an implicit hierarchy of clients wherein white women are constructed as 'attendable' i.e. deserving of the highest degree of care, whereas black women are constructed as 'disattendable'. The frameworks of attendability and disattendability show how the production of intimacy in the beauty salon, between salon owners and clients, is underpinned by commercial considerations. South Asian women occupy a fuzzy place in the hierarchy of attendability, their traits as customers produced as undesirable in opposition to white clients, while they are simultaneously reclaimed as 'our people' through complex boundary work. This relationship is not straightforward as I will show how considerations of commerce sometimes produce and at other times run counter to the production of intimacy between South Asian beauticians and clients. The commercial considerations underpinning client-beautician interactions complicate intimacy in the beauty salon with South Asian women, but do not disrupt the beauty salon as a potential site of diasporic intimacy. With white and to a much lesser degree with black clients, however, I will show how commercial considerations produce contingent intimacies, that are situational and unstable.

8.2. The 'attendability' of white clients

One busy Sunday, a middle-aged white woman, Lily, entered Noor's Hair & Beauty. Her visit could not be good news, Noor told me quietly before greeting the new arrival, as Lily had got a haircut at the salon just the day before from another beautician. As predicted, Lily told Noor that she was not happy with her haircut and would like it to be shorter. 'No problem, darling,' Noor offered to fix Lily's hair for her. She sat Lily down and buttoned a cape around her neck. 'You have a husband or a boyfriend, darling?' Noor asked, her usual conversation starter with white clients, while spraying water to wet her hair. Lily went on to tell her about her ex-boyfriend, the father of her children, who did drugs and cheated on her. Noor listened patiently. Lily told her that she was now with a new partner and that she felt happy in this relationship. In neither of her relationships, however, had she felt the need to marry. On hearing this, Noor immediately asked Lily if she was religious. Lily replied that she was not brought up to be religious and that she questioned the existence of God when she saw horrible things happening in the world. Noor did not protest. She calmly ran her scissors through Lily's hair while holding it down with a fine-toothed comb. After thinking about what Lily

had said, Noor opined that it was true that there were horrible things happening in the world and they did make you question the existence of God. 'Perhaps that is God's test for human beings,' she added.

After Lily was content with her short bob, she handed Noor a few pounds worth of change. 'No, no darling, no need for this,' Noor hesitated. As soon as Lily had left, Noor said to me: 'Would "our women" tip for a correction after having paid £95 for hair colour and cut the previous day? They'd say, "I have paid you more than enough already"'.

On another occasion, a frail white woman, Daisy, walked into the salon, enquired about the price of a trim and settled down on one of the chairs. There were four of us in the salon – Noor, Farzaneh, Bahar and I – eating samosas and sweets I had bought. Noor instructed Farzaneh to prepare Daisy for haircut by putting on a cape and wetting her hair while Noor finished her snack. As soon as Farzaneh started spraying water on her hair, Daisy mumbled instructions on how her hair should be wet, providing a glimpse of how demanding she was as a client. Noor quickly took over from Farzaneh. 'What's your name, darling?' she asked her client. When Daisy returned the question, I heard Noor pronounce her name with a distinctive British inflection for her benefit. 'How do you spell it?' asked Daisy.

Next, Noor asked where Daisy was from. 'I am from this little island called Saint Helena,' the old woman answered in a quivering voice. '*Sentellena*, what a beautiful name!' remarked Noor, 'I had not heard of it before.' Daisy did not, however, ask where Noor was from. She said to Noor that her usual hairdresser was so old that they had had to shut shop and Daisy had since been looking for a hairdresser who would suit her. She had tried several but not liked anyone. 'If you like my cut, then you come back to me darling,' Noor seized the opportunity to demonstrate her salesmanship. She explained that Daisy was getting a full haircut for the price of a trim. Next time, she would even throw in a blow-dry for the same price.

'Are you celebrating?' Daisy asked in the middle of her haircut. Noor looked confused by the question. 'Maybe because she saw us eating, she thinks we are celebrating,' Farzaneh chimed in, in Urdu. 'Celebrating what, darling?' Noor asked Daisy. 'The Queen's Jubilee,' Daisy mumbled. 'Oh yes. We are celebrating with music and food,' said Noor while putting her tongue between her teeth in admission of her fabricated answer. Bahar and I exchanged looks and smile. 'You can even have a

drink,' Daisy added. 'I don't drink, darling, but I will have a fruit juice,' said Noor. It was hard to tell if Daisy liked the haircut from her inscrutable expression but she left a one-pound tip. After she was gone, all four of us laughed at what Noor had just said about the Jubilee celebrations. 'Who cares about the Queen?' smirked Bahar. 'Maybe because she is as old as the Queen herself, she does,' said Farzaneh.

Both these vignettes illustrate the kind of emotional labour that was invested into serving white clients. Hochschild (2003, 2012) categorized emotional labours by the level of 'acting' involved in them. Surface acting is when one controls one's appearance or behaviour to display the emotions warranted by the situation. Deep acting, on the other hand, requires the individual to alter their inner feelings to genuinely experience those emotions. With white clients, Noor managed her feelings ('deep acting') and their external expressions ('surface acting') in a way that she did not do in the presence of South Asian clients (Hochschild, 2012: 7). She did not contradict them even when their beliefs differed but waited for them to leave the salon before she expressed her shock and/or disapproval. In the first vignette, Lily's liberal views on marriage, partnership and religion elicited patient listening and engagement instead of disapproval and criticism from Noor. With white clients, Noor did not try to do what she usually did with South Asian clients i.e. impose her ideas of morality and respectability. Rather, she adapted to what she thought were conventions of Western life. Once, when a young white woman was discussing her boyfriend, Noor asked her why she had not moved in with him yet. The woman answered that she did not want to rush the relationship and preferred to wait another year before moving in together. Noor supported her saying that it was good to take the relationship slowly to keep it fresh and exciting. By contrast, when I or any other young South Asian woman talked about our romantic relationships, we were asked if we were going to marry our partners and how soon we would do so. Another time, when a young white woman answered Noor's 'Do you have a boyfriend, darling?' with 'I like women', Noor chose not to probe any further; but she turned to me as soon as the client was out of the salon. 'Did you hear that? She likes women!'

Moreover, as shown in the vignette about her interaction with Daisy, Noor tried to minimise difference from white clients by saying things that she thought they expected to hear. Instead of expressing her thoughts on the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations, Noor gave an answer that had the least potential to cause conflict or discomfort to her client. While her identity as a practising Muslim woman was extremely important to her, she did not articulate it in front of white clients.

Even when she had an opportunity to explain her religious beliefs, when Daisy suggested she have a drink to celebrate, Noor quickly mentioned that 'I don't drink, darling' only to go on to assure her, 'but I will have a fruit juice'. Her conversations with white clients were calibrated to establish sameness rather than highlight difference. While it is tempting to label such interactions as 'fake' or 'acting', I am more inclined to read them as acts of performative intimacy. In service interactions (as in life generally), there is an element of performance to intimacy. While there was a degree of performance in all service interactions in the beauty salon, it was often more obvious with white clients. Noor performed intimacy with white clients through the incessant use of 'darling' as well as minimising difference and emphasising similarity in conversation. If Noor gave voice to her views on morality and respectability with white clients, many would no longer feel comfortable discussing their personal lives with her.

This kind of performative intimacy, then, was grounded in commercial considerations of not wanting to offend and to retain white clients. It cannot be separated from the boundary work South Asian salon owners performed with relation to white women as mentioned in Chapter 5. Sexual permissiveness, alcohol consumption, smoking and atheism were believed to be typical traits of white British women. Thus, while these traits posited them as morally inferior to South Asian women, they were never commented on so as to make white clients feel cared for. Instead, a white client was a priori assumed to be knowledgeable, appreciative, generous and deserving of the highest degree of 'care'. This can be encapsulated in the concept of 'attendability' – because of all the aforementioned qualities, a white client became attendable. For the beautician, 'to attend' means 'to give attention, to care for and care about, to accompany, to be observant of, to listen to, to serve' (Tate, 2014: 2481). White clients were frequently asked during the service interaction if they were feeling alright. From the temperature of the water in the sink to the pressure applied during a massage, beauticians made sure that everything was to their liking. White clients were never challenged on their views and they were listened to without judgment (or else judgment is reserved for later). Being attended to in this way makes one feel valued. It carries positive affect and feelings of self-worth. As the white client was presumed to be attendable even before the service interaction has begun, the encounter resembled a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby the client left feeling cared for and was highly likely to tip and shower compliments on the beautician. Tips, even though not solicited, were welcome as they made the beautician feel appreciated.

The attendability of white clients can be read as contingent intimacy that was performative and situational. While white women were constructed as ideal clients, they were simultaneously 'othered' as morally inferior. In the absence of white women, Noor often discussed their moral decline with fellow Pakistani women, claiming superior status through her religiosity and adherence to tradition. From what white women told her about their lives, she had constructed an understanding of them as lacking moral values and belonging to unstable families. Thus, although white women were valued as clients over South Asian women, they were deemed to possess undesirable traits and immoral lifestyles compared to 'our women'. These distinctions reveal the complex mental gymnastics that go into discursive formations of 'us' and 'them'. As Nira Yuval-Davis reminds us, however, it is important not to reduce all others to the Other.

> …in identity narratives that related to most daily situations, there were no such dichotomous divisions between 'us' and 'them', and that people's social worlds were of much more complex natures, with a whole range of distinctions and relations between people, from close identification and association, to total indifference, as well as rejection and conflict (Yuval-Davis, 2010: 277).

Thus, white women were 'others' with whom the South Asian beautician shared a complex relationship of identification as well as rejection.

8.2.1. Class, culture and care

While care in beauty work has not yet been theorised, an understanding of care derived from transculturally based nursing theories could be useful to appreciate how beauticians perceive care in the beauty industry, especially in relation to white clients. In developing a transcultural nursing theory that could meet the cultural needs of clients, Madeleine Leininger (1996: 72) argued that in order to provide culturally appropriate care, generic care practices of different cultures needed to be incorporated into professional care practices that nurses learnt at school. For example, application of transcultural care theory in a study of Lebanese-Muslim migrants in the United States showed that nurses needed to be aware of gender roles in families, the requirement to pray five times a day and desired cultural foods (Luna, 1989; Leininger, 1997).

While ‘culture’ is a word often attached to non-white communities such that white culture appears neutral, a culture-based understanding of care applied to the context of beauty salons lets us see how South Asian beauticians view white British culture. Beauticians try to care for white women in ways that they deem culturally appropriate for them, drawing on the importance of self-care, individual attention and pampering in Western cultures. In beauticians’ understanding, white women desire personalised attention and conversation that makes them feel pampered.

In her research on Korean-owned nail salons in New York, Miliann Kang (2003) made a similar observation. White middle-class customers visiting an upmarket salon in Manhattan emphasised the emotional attentiveness of manicurists as a crucial component in the service interaction. They expected the manicurist to ‘display a caring demeanour and engage in pleasant one-on-one conversation’ with them (Kang, 2003: 828). Manicurists worked hard to conform to this expectation, resulting in the performance of care that was noticeably higher than what was done in Kang’s other research sites that involved non-white and non-middle-class clienteles. This led Kang (2010) to conceptualise three kinds of body labour: pampering body labour, expressive body labour and routinised body labour. In serving white, middle-class customers, manicurists place a great deal of importance on emotional attentiveness by engaging in one-on-one conversations and putting forth a caring demeanour– pampering body labour. In salons frequented by Caribbean and African American women from working-class backgrounds, manicurists provide less emotional labour but focus their efforts on offering original and creative nail designs that their clients value while communicating a sense of respect and fairness. In ‘routinized body labour’ serving lower-middle-class women of mixed races, manicurists seek to ensure a high turnover of customers who each receive ‘satisfactory but not special emotional and physical treatment’ (Kang, 2010: 835).

It is important in this context to remember ‘the complex and profoundly under-appreciated intersection of race and class’ (Rollock, 2014: 446). As race is co-constructed with gender and class, we need to be sensitive to how race and class intersect in the beauty salon, propagating an understanding of white clients as middle class, which further validates their claims to attendability. For white women, skin colour acts as a form of embodied capital as opposed to black women who have to put in work to convince others that they are legitimate members of the middle class (Rollock, 2014).

The nexus of race and class also helps us understand how, when compared to white women, 'our people' or South Asian clients were constructed as a category of clients who need not be attended to in the same way, as they were often considered as working-class migrants. When I asked Noor why white clients needed more care, she turned the question round to answer in terms of why South Asian clients did *not* need as much care. 'Our women don't have that much knowledge,' she said. What I understood this to mean was that South Asian women, especially working-class ones, did not know what to expect in a professional salon and did not expect such high standards of care. They were happy just to get the job done. White women, on the other hand, expected higher standards of care. Noor also said that South Asian women did not know how to express their feelings. 'Even if they like the haircut, they will say, "ok, thank you." But with white women, they will say, "oh wow, I look amazing!" That appreciation is something a beautician wants in her job'. Thus, pleasing the white client became important for two reasons: first, she was more vocal about her feelings and thus more likely to express her satisfaction as well as dissatisfaction (which could also take the form of online reviews that mattered a great deal for small businesses, especially in order to attract middle-class clients); second, her articulation of satisfaction and praise made the beautician feel good about her work. This praise perhaps acquired greater significance when it was seen as coming from middle-class clients who expected and were used to high standards of service.

Although the clientele at Anita's Hair & Beauty – unlike that at Noor's Hair & Beauty – was largely racially homogeneous, white clients were still understood as the most 'attendable' group. This was partly because Anita and the beauticians she employed had also worked in other salons, where they had experienced dealing with white women. There were, however, a couple of regular clients at Anita's Hair & Beauty who were white; they were taken as representative of all white women. With them, Anita too used 'darling' excessively, showing extra care and formality. When I asked Anita about the difference between white clients and others, I was surprised at how closely her answer echoed Noor's.

> Anita: I had never heard 'darling' in Nepal. Or 'sweetheart'. When I hear these words from *gorey* [whites], I am in heaven! I am like, 'Oh my God, you can say such nice things to people!' In the salon, they never nit-pick about the beautician's work. Only South Asians do that. *Gorey*, for even little things, say 'Oh My God, you made me so nice! I was never like this before!' They say such nice things. They really appreciate your work. That's what I like

about them. With our South Asians, they will always ask you to lower the price. Their mentality remains the same, even when they are here. White people, they might give you more in tips, but they will never ask you to lower the price. We don't expect tips, but at least give us our due for the hard work we do. We have come here to work. You can ask for lower prices at a vegetable shop. That makes sense. But this is a salon.

To talk about the attitudes of South Asian clients here is not to wander off the point about the 'attendability' of white clients, because that 'attendability' was constructed with reference to the attributes found lacking in South Asian clients. White women were imagined as appreciative, knowledgeable and generous by comparison with South Asian women who lacked those very qualities, illustrating how racialisation and construction of identities work as a dialogical process (Yuval-Davis, 2010). It also shows how at the end of the day, the beauty salon was a business and 'our people' were seen as not respecting the hard work and the economic needs of salon owners, underlining the commercial basis of intimacy in beauty salons.

8.3. The 'disattendability' of black clients

One Friday morning, two women wearing grey burqas walked into the salon. Noor was in the massage room, waxing the legs of a client. I asked the women to take a seat. One of them, Iram, a Pakistani woman I already knew, told me that she had brought her friend, Aida, a black Muslim woman. I asked Aida what service she would like. She said that she wanted to get her eyebrows threaded. 'Is Noor giving a massage inside?' Aida asked. 'No, she is waxing,' I told her. 'What is waxing?' Aida asked Iram. That is when I realised that Aida was not familiar with the world of beauty salons. When Noor came out, Aida was introduced to her by Iram as a new client who could become a regular. 'My pleasure to serve you, darling,' said Noor, inviting Aida to take a seat. A pleasant start. Noor asked whether Aida had ever had her eyebrows threaded before. Aida said no, she used a hair removal cream as she was afraid of pain. Noor asked me to stretch the skin around her eyebrows with my fingers as Aida was not accustomed to the procedure (stretching the skin reduces the risk of cuts and abrasions by the sharp thread as well as reducing the pain). The skin on Aida's forehead was sticky, perhaps because of a cream or oil she had applied. 'Look at what she has applied to her face,' Noor remarked to me in Urdu, prompting my anxiety about how this encounter was going to

proceed. Prior experience in the salon told me that it was a bad sign when Noor switched to Urdu in the presence of a black client.

As someone who had never had her eyebrows removed with a thread before, Aida panicked. She moaned with pain as a sharp thread plucked out wanton hair from her eyebrows. Noor was irritated and made no effort to hide it. 'Who have you brought to me?' she remarked to Iram in Urdu. Her tone was hostile. Slightly embarrassed, Iram said that Aida was her classmate from evening college. 'What do you both study?' asked Noor. 'Childminding,' answered Iram. 'Is she as annoying in college as well?' Noor continued her conversation with Iram in Urdu while working on Aida's eyebrows. The 'annoying' characteristic that Aida displayed was that she was afraid of pain and expressed her discomfort vocally rather than accepting it as the price to be paid for arched eyebrows. She even made witty remarks about enduring pain in a beauty salon which made me think of her as smart and funny. She referred to Noor as 'sister'.

Aida asked for hair removal from her face as well. Noor suggested hot wax, a kind of wax that was supposed to be less painful than the regular one. 'Never again,' said Aida, moaning with pain as Noor applied a layer of pink hot wax on her skin and stripped it off after a few seconds. 'Does she have kids?' Noor asked Iram in Urdu, instead of asking Aida directly. 'Yes, she has three children who are all adults now, *Alhamdulliah*,' Iram answered, in Urdu as well. 'Darling, how did you deal with that pain? The pain of having babies,' Noor now turned to Aida, in English. 'That pain is different,' said Aida. 'Don't lie to me, I have three children myself, I know that pain. You say never again and then in one year you are doing it again,' Noor alluded to the 'never again' Aida had said in response to the pain of waxing. After the waxing was done, she applied a soothing aloe vera gel to Aida's face. She also complimented her on her glowing skin and her beautiful features that made her look younger than her age. The compliments, however, did little to conceal the hostility in her tone and mocking facial expressions which were for the benefit of the audience i.e., Iram and I.

Next, Aida showed Noor some black marks on her back and asked if they could be removed. Clearly, Aida did not go to beauty salons often and, now she was here, wanted to 'fix' everything at once. Noor said that she would need laser treatment which was quite expensive. Each session cost £100 and Aida would need 7-8 sessions to get rid of the black marks completely. Aida was shocked to hear the prices. 'I am poor,' she said, getting up from the salon chair. 'Look how poor she is,' Noor pointed

to the black handbag Aida was carrying and commented in Urdu, but her meaning was clear to Aida from her tone and gesture. 'I got it from Westfield shopping centre, you can also get one like it,' she said to Noor. 'I am poor, darling,' said Noor this time, mockingly. 'But you are a businesswoman!' retorted Aida. The air was heavy with tension. Iram and I giggled nervously. Just as she was about to leave, Aida turned to Noor and made a final remark, 'If you want other women to come to you, you must speak in a language that everyone understands. Try not to talk constantly in your own language.'

Aida did not come back. As with most other black women, Noor had not really tried to turn her into a regular client. I mentioned feeling anxious about how this interaction would proceed at the beginning of this vignette, given that I was by now into my second year of fieldwork at Noor's salon and had witnessed similar interactions before. So, I already knew that Noor's Hair & Beauty was not a welcoming place for black women. It had not taken me long to realise that, as the following vignette from the first month of my fieldwork will show.

It was nearly time to shut shop on a Sunday evening. A middle-aged black woman walked in carrying several shopping bags. 'How much for fixing false lashes?' she asked, in a hurried manner. 'Twenty pounds,' answered Noor. 'Why?' asked the woman, clearly taken aback. 'Why! What you mean why?' said Noor. 'The place I usually go to charges £10 but they are shut today - wouldn't have come here otherwise,' the woman said. 'Well, I use expensive products. No worries, darling. Bye!' said Noor, the 'darling' and the 'bye' uttered half-mockingly, making it clear that she did not care one way or another about the woman's custom. The woman, after much deliberation and fretting over the price, gave in. It was her daughter's wedding the next day and she needed to get her lashes done. I was watching this scene unfold from the waiting area. While fixing false lashes on the woman's eyelids, Noor talked incessantly in Urdu with me, something she did not normally do when other clients were around. She did ask a few perfunctory questions of the client in English: what will she wear for the wedding? How many people are invited? Is it a big ceremony? The client sounded nervous and edgy about all the preparations she had yet to finish -- not in the mood for a drawn-out conversation. 'Did you see how rude that woman was?' Noor remarked as soon as the client left. Then, she proceeded to tell me an anecdote: one day, while two women were awaiting their turn, a black woman walked in. Noor told her that she would have to wait. 'Why? Because I am black?' the woman angrily demanded. Noor asked her to leave saying she would not tolerate rude clients. She

says she felt scared but showed her the door nonetheless. The anecdote was intended to make a point: 'black women are so rude!'

Just as with white clients, the encounter between a black client and the South Asian beautician was also predetermined by racialisation. Racialisation produced black women as 'disattendable' in an act of 'always already "knowing" the other before "perceiving" the other through body contact' (Tate, 2016: 69). Once a client had been marked as 'disattendable', she was not deemed worthy of care. Even though attempts at conversation were made, they were often desultory and accompanied by snide remarks in Urdu or Punjabi if there was someone present who spoke that language. A 'disattendable' client was tolerable when she was docile and undemanding, but if she was demanding or vocal, she was quickly labelled as yet another 'angry black woman' (Tate, 2014: 2477). 'Disattendability' reproduced race by reinforcing racist stereotypes. Just as 'attendability' produced positive affect in the sense of feeling cared for, resulting in praise for the beautician, 'disattendability' created negative affect, evoking feelings of being dismissed or ignored. That was an unpleasant experience for the client, who then protested at or reacted to the beautician's unpleasant behaviour. Their response to being treated dismissively was then read as 'rude' by the beautician, reinforcing the racist stereotype of black clients as rude. Proximity, or the 'skin-to-skin touching of the other', did not, in this case, work to erase distance but rather to keep racism in place (Tate, 2016: 78). Their perceived disattendability, thus, foreclosed the possibility of intimacy with black clients at Noor's Hair & Beauty. As I have mentioned in Chapter 6, language was deliberately instrumentalised as a tool for othering black clients at Noor's salon. Noor spoke in another language if there was a South Asian person present in the salon, instead of speaking directly to the client. In this regard, what Aida says to Noor was illustrative: 'If you want other women to come to you, you must speak in a language that everyone understands'. While discovery of a shared language between women could create immediate intimacy in the salon, it could also shun others who did not understand or speak that language and make them feel unwelcome, even belittled.

8.3.1. Aesthetic Othering

Black women were also created as the aesthetic Other. While whiteness was considered desirable in the South Asian beauty salon, blackness was constructed as an 'aesthetic problem' (Horton, 2021: 151). Instead of trying to understand the historical and cultural specificities of black femininity,

beauticians measured it against the standards of white femininity. One reason for the comparison might be that while representations of white femininity are ubiquitous, there are hardly any media depictions of the beauty regimes of black women. South Asian beauticians have no first-hand experience of the variety of hair textures of black women as they rarely wash or style it. Thus, like many other non-black women, they simply do not know 'what "Black Hair" feels like, how it is maintained, what products are used on it, and what beauty practices are employed' (Candelario, 2020: 32). As black femininity is culturally distant from and often unintelligible to the South Asian beautician, certain aspects of it tend to be characterised as 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 1966: 44). Comments were passed on product residue or flaking in afro hair as dirt, or adhesive for wigs that left sticky spots on salon chairs as disgusting. Stickiness thus was understood as an undesirable yet inherent property of the hair and skin of black women. In the face of this wilful ignorance and prejudice, the South Asian beauty salon emerged as a racist space where black women were Othered. This also maintained the beauty salon as a racially segregated space as black women understandably felt more comfortable going to black-owned salons, where they were treated with respect.

Here too, one must pay attention to the nexus of race and class. On one occasion, I was surprised to see Noor engaged in a lively chat with a black Muslim woman wearing a stylish head wrap, while threading her eyebrows. The woman was introduced to me as a regular client, a doctor by profession. As it was Ramzan, Noor told her client that they could break their fast together. Given previous experiences, I was surprised at how well this client was being treated. As soon as she left, Noor told me that the client was well-educated, well-spoken and married to a rich businessman. She looked after herself and had flawless skin and body. She first came to Noor's salon when she had just migrated from Ethiopia and Noor was surprised at how good her English was, for a new arrival. In marking this woman as upper-class – somebody who was 'well-spoken' and looked after her body – Noor was differentiating her from other black women who were 'rude' and 'dirty'. Thus, this client's class position trumped her blackness, bestowing 'attendability' on her. Noor not only treated her as she would treat white clients but also invited her to break fast together, a privilege usually accorded only to South Asian Muslim women.

Few black clients, however, were sufficiently privileged to be deemed attendable. The dirt and undesirability attributed to most black women at Noor's salon, in their worst manifestation, came to be equated with contagion. This became clear to me in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic.

After the first lockdown was lifted in London in 2020, certain services such as eyebrow threading – which would have brought beauticians into face-to-face contact with customers – were not allowed. Yet, at Noor's salon, these services were being offered to clients quite arbitrarily. What I began to observe was that whenever a new (unknown) client walked into the salon and asked for eyebrow threading, the outcome depended on the colour of their skin. If the client was South Asian, their eyebrows would be threaded. If the client was white, they would be offered a choice between waxing (requiring less proximity and contact than threading) and threading. If the client was black, however, they would be offered only waxing. Noor would not only do so herself but also instruct the other beauticians to do the same. The framing I heard was that it was okay to thread the eyebrows of 'our people' which I understood to be South Asian women. But then I noticed that some white women were being offered eyebrow threading as well, which meant that only black women were being excluded. For me as an observer, this was turning out to be a case of 'I just can't quite put my finger on it' or something that 'we think/say as we struggle to identify racism's invisible touch' (Tate, 2016: 69).

One day, my suspicions were confirmed when an unknown black woman came in and asked the price for eyebrow threading. Noor instructed Sara in Urdu, 'Tell her that we do waxing only'. Noor turned to the client and said, 'Darling, because of coronavirus, we do wax only'. The client agreed to eyebrow waxing and sat down on the salon chair. Right next to her, Noor began to thread the eyebrows of a South Asian client, who was a regular. I felt extremely tense throughout the threading session, worried that the black woman would notice that another client's eyebrows were being threaded right next to her and ask why, or even worse, point out the discrimination. In such interactions, my own anxiety brought out to the difficulty of witnessing racism as a participant-observer and feeling complicit in it. While I was deeply unsettled, I was also afraid to point out these encounters to Noor as racist.

After the client left, I asked Noor why she had instructed Sara not to thread the black woman's eyebrows. Taking offence to the insinuation in my question, she said, 'It's not allowed! I do it for "our clients" as a favour, but it's not allowed. Even during the lockdown, I was sometimes serving "our clients" in the salon while keeping the shutters down. Because I know that they don't have COVID'. This statement illustrated two things to me: first, beauticians and their regular clients operate out of a fierce sense of loyalty, sticking to each other even through a pandemic. Second, the

bodies we know are the bodies we trust. Beauticians trusted their regular clients to be COVID-free, without enquiring or requiring any proof. Although Noor switched from 'our people' to 'our clients' in her answer, I noted a curious overlap between these two categories. South Asians were both 'our people' and 'our clients'. White women were not 'our people' but could be 'our clients', such that they were owed loyalty by the beautician. Black women, however, fell outside both the categories of 'our people' and 'our clients', and were hence viewed as a possible source of contagion. In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, scholars have written about the 'doubling of the idea of contagion' in various contexts wherein 'a culturally polluted person is rendered even more pestilential because of contagion' (Satyogi, 2021: 40). At Noor's salon, it were the bodies of black women that could not be trusted to be free of the virus. They were also the women who could not be trusted in another sense. 'What if we thread their eyebrows and then they complain about us? What if they have been sent by the authorities?' Noor and Sara said to me, on another occasion. Thus, the Otherness of black women positioned them as far as possible from 'our people'.

Although it is not possible for me to bring Anita's Hair & Beauty into this discussion to any significant extent – because, during two years of fieldwork there, I only came across two black clients - the anti-black sentiment was still unmissable. While Anita was more circumspect in her dealings with black clients, racist jokes often prompted shared laughter in the salon. When I asked Anita about the presence of white women on the brochures and posters of salons run by and generally populated by South Asians, she gave what she thought was a reasoned answer.

> Nandita: Why are there always white women on the brochures and boards of South Asian salons?
>
> Anita: It wasn't me who put white people on the posters. I gave it to the designer and said I need a picture with good eyebrows. I gave him the requirements of what I wanted to show. I think they choose white women because you can see them from further away. What do you think? Suppose you're driving along. Can you see black from a distance? If I put a black woman on the board, you'd just drive past without even noticing.

Although Anita's supposedly neutral response was purely hypothetical (I have seldom come across dark-skinned, let alone black women, on the posters in beauty salons in India or South Asian salons in the UK), it still shows how blackness is constructed as undesirable. That 'undesirability' might be

partly commercial in nature, given that South Asian beauty salons in London do not target black women as potential clients. In contrast, I have noticed quite a few South Asian salons in Paris include dark-skinned and black women on their billboards as those salons include a higher proportion of black clients in their customer base.[7] Thus, the anti-blackness found in the South Asian salon in London also reflects the fact that South Asian salon owners can afford to forego black women's custom , given the large numbers of South Asian women from whom they can draw their clientele.

The commercial basis of intimacy, however, can also throw up interesting surprises. While Noor did not care for the custom of black women, for the most part, and therefore made no effort to retain them as clients, there were a few months during my fieldwork when I noticed a change in her attitude. This was also a period when Noor was bothered by dwindling business due to the pandemic. Although she still received a good number of clients, some of her regulars had stopped coming, which created the need to turn new clients into regulars. For a brief while, this prompted Noor to be warm and welcoming towards all clients, including black women. For example, one day two black women came in for eyebrow threading. Noor spoke with them courteously, asking questions about their personal lives, trying to build rapport. With one of them who had a lighter complexion, she even tried to establish sameness by saying, 'Where are you from, darling? Look, your colour and my colour is the same.' The woman answered that she was from Jamaica. 'But you not look like *them*!' said Noor, intending it as a compliment.

Thus, contingent intimacies, spurred by commerce, could be possible between the South Asian beautician and her black clients. However, these intimacies were fleeting and unstable and did not ameliorate anti-black racism in the South Asian beauty salon.

8.4. South Asian clients or *apney log*

8.4.1. Haggling and the care imperative

[7] Based on the findings of a three-month study of South Asian beauty salons I conducted in Paris from September-December 2022, funded by a grant from Centre Maurice Halbwachs, EHESS.

A young Pakistani woman, Aamra, walked into Noor's Hair & Beauty one Saturday afternoon. When I informed her that Noor was massaging a client in the massage room, she mistook me for a client and subjected me to a deluge of questions: Are Noor's haircuts any good? Does she also condition the hair after shampoo? What are the prices like? Is she the only beautician in this salon? Does she not have any assistants? After introducing myself, I told her that she would have to wait for thirty minutes. While deciding on whether to wait or not, Aamra told me that she worked in a nearby hospital and only got Saturdays off. She had to do the laundry, clean the house and cook on Saturdays. She could not afford to wait in a beauty salon for half an hour. But she waited anyway, all the while asking me questions about Noor's skills and the prices on offer.

Once Noor emerged, a negotiation ensued. After asking Aamra what services she was after, Noor said that she would charge £20 for a haircut, £30 if the haircut was followed by a blow-dry, £40 for highlights and £4 for eyebrows. Aamra said that the prices were too high. Not wanting to lose out on a client who had sauntered in on a lean day, Noor said that she would give her a 'good price', doing it all for £60 instead of £74. Aamra was still not satisfied. '£50,' she said. Noor refused to negotiate any further. 'Ok, £55 then,' Aamra proposed. 'I will not do it for less than £60, please feel free to find another salon if you are not happy,' Noor declared. Aamra relented.

Despite the unpleasant start, Noor and Aamra got talking. When Aamra discovered that Noor was also from Pakistan, she said, 'Look how I walked into this salon by chance and found a slice of Pakistan!' As there were no other clients that day, Noor served her patiently and caringly. First, she highlighted Aamra's hair by applying dye to strands of hair, wrapping them up in sheets of foil for thirty minutes and then washing them off. Then she cut the hair in layers with a short fringe framing Aamra's face. She kept calm when Aamra asked her to have another go as she was not pleased with the style. In haircuts that create layers in hair, a second attempt is not a small 'fix' but involves nearly the same amount of labour as the first. Exasperated just by watching them, I left to grab lunch. When I came back an hour later, Noor was still working on Aamra's hair, now blow drying it. She instructed Aamra to keep her head down but Aamra kept looking up to gaze at herself in the mirror. As Noor combed the hair with a curling brush and turned on the blow-dryer, her patience was wearing thin. 'If your patients in the hospital keep moving when you are treating them, won't you get angry?' she scolded her client as one would a child. 'I will leave your blow-dry midway if you keep moving like

this'. After her highlights, haircut and blow-dry were done, which she was evidently pleased with, Aamra paid and left without even a thank you.

For Noor, client demands for lower prices were condescending slights that undervalued her labour and skills. What this haggling also revealed was that manipulated into offering a lower price, the beautician did not feel compelled to 'care' for the client in the same way that she would with a client who accepted the price named. When serving South Asian clients who haggled, Noor did not put in the emotional labour of managing her feelings and could be quite open in expressing her irritation or exhaustion. In several instances, even with first-time clients, I saw her reprimand them like children or tell them pointedly that their behaviour wore her down. She nonetheless provided high-quality services as she was well aware that these clients could easily become regulars, while at the same time cutting down on the emotional labour that accompanied the service in case of full-paying clients. This was primarily because such interactions left beauticians feeling that their work was not appreciated. I was interested to hear Noor talking to another beautician from Pakistan, who also owned a beauty salon in London.

> Noor: I don't like Pakistani women. They say, 'Cut my hair for five pounds. You are sitting idle anyway. What do you have to do? Just run scissors through my hair!'
>
> Saba: It is as though all our skills are worth nothing.
>
> Noor: Yeah, we have trained so much, spent so many years improving our skills, but these women don't value them. White women never say things like that. They appreciate our work.

Noor and Saba then went on to dissect which of their South Asian client groups – Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi or Sri Lankan – bargained the hardest. This 'annoying' trait of South Asian women – haggling – was always contrasted with the appreciation of white women.

Interestingly, when beauticians cut down on informal care, it was not necessarily interpreted as such by the client. Had Aamra minded the way Noor spoke to her, she would not have returned to the salon two weeks later, as she did. For some clients, haggling could be a trade off such that they came to accept the likelihood of diminished, if not absent intimacy, in exchange for a price cut. For them,

it was the reduced price that made them a loyal client of the salon. For others, however, their ability to get the price lowered might have denoted a form of closeness in itself.

While it is clear that bargaining or haggling was perceived as undesirable by the beauticians, it is also worth asking *why* South Asian clients haggle. Writing about the behaviour of Indian customers in South Asian grocery shops in Berkeley, Arijit Sen (2009) describes haggling as one of the spatial and cultural practices through which Indian migrants make sense of the environment in which they find themselves. For migrants, shopping in the ethnic neighbourhood or ethnic shops is 'both a culturally embedded economic activity and an economically shaded cultural experience' (Wang & Lo, 2007: 685). What haggling may or may not achieve also depends on 'commonly shared meanings', which is why South Asians will not do it with a non-South Asian person at a South Asian grocery store (Sen, 2009: 2).

> The rhetoric of home demands that the modes of propriety, behavior and public transaction expected in the public realm are suspended in the informal homelike atmosphere of the Indian stores. To the customer that means that they can haggle and demand a special low "family" price from the store owners. For the store owners, survival depends on the delicate balance between profitable business and the homelike informality of the ethnic domain (Sen, 1998:134).

I therefore read haggling as a translocal practice that mediates between cultures, places and economies. The South Asian salon provided a sense of continuity to first-generation migrant women as a space where the practice of haggling, an embedded cultural memory for many South Asians, was rendered intelligible. That South Asian women felt comfortable enough to haggle with Noor and Anita was testimony to their sense of familiarity and belonging in the space of the South Asian salon. When their haggling was a success, a lower price signified to them the equivalent of a 'friends and family discount' which was very likely to turn them into regular clients of the salon. From the clients' perspective, then, haggling can be read as a practice of exercising intimacy. The value of haggling lies not just in the process, but also the outcome. A space where South Asian customers are able to bring down the prices of a service through informal negotiations becomes an intimate space to them.

For the salon owners, however, as suggested by Sen, it can be perceived as an impediment to running a profitable business. One Indian shop owner in Sen's research even explained his decision to place

a non-Indian store clerk at the counter as a way to discourage any attempt by Indian shoppers to fraternise or haggle. For Noor, the ethnicity of the majority of her clients thus became a barrier to her ambition of expanding her salon business. Although she knew that the ethnic makeup of the area would bring mainly South Asian clients to her salon, she chose the location because it was within walking distance of her house.

> Nandita: The clientele of the salon depends on the area. What were your thoughts in that regard?
>
> Noor: I had thought of opening my salon in a white area. As I had worked in this area before, I knew how it was. But I didn't have an option. If I had one, I would have chosen a different area. But…I have worked very hard. It's not so easy to find clients here because there's not enough money around. But thankfully I've managed to make a few. You obviously develop relationships with people once you start working. I want to move now but it will be difficult.

Thus, for salon owners like Noor, South Asians were a category of clients that were not entirely desirable despite being 'our people'. Anticipating haggling, Noor often quoted slightly higher prices to South Asian clients. To this end, her rate card gave out a price range instead of listing the precise price for a service, giving her the room to accommodate haggling practices. With clients who did not pay the full price, Noor also cut down on informal care practices that were part of her interactions with white clients and that were essential if clients were to feel pampered. These shortcuts did not, however, result in a breakdown of intimacy between the beautician and the client, as the following vignette will illustrate.

One Sunday afternoon, Aliya, a middle-aged Pakistani woman, walked in demanding that her hair be curled for the wedding reception she was supposed to attend in a few hours. Not only was she in a hurry, but, by her own admission, she was also having a bad hair day. Noor did not look very happy to see her. I could tell from her face when she found a client difficult. She started working on Aliya's hair, twisting strands around a hot iron, letting them be for a while, and then releasing them so they would fall over the shoulders in waves.

'Noor, I have known you for three years now, but you haven't visited me,' Aliya said. 'Come over on a weekday when my husband is not around'. 'Ok, text me your address,' Noor answered. There was

a beep on Noor's phone immediately. While curling Aliya's hair, Noor asked her about each and every member of her family in London and also wanted to know about the extended family in Pakistan. She rattled off every detail she remembered – about the client's son, her mother-in-law, her sisters in Pakistan … In turn, this encouraged Aliya to share all kinds of gossip, supplemented with photographic evidence on her phone. It had been thirty minutes – Noor had been diligently working on Aliya's hair whilst talking to her - but the curls refused to set. 'I told you I'm having a bad hair day': Aliya was getting impatient, considering she did not have much time. What she did have was a litany of advice on how her hair should be done that she kept interrupting Noor with. She even pulled out her phone and showed her pictures of how beautifully her hair had been done at a salon in Pakistan when she attended her niece's wedding. 'The salons in Pakistan are awesome,' she remarked. Noor was annoyed by this jibe. 'Can you stop irritating me and let me do my job? I am trying my best,' she raised her voice. She eventually fixed rollers in Aliya's hair and sent her home for the curls to set. When she quoted the price for her service, Aliya negotiated. 'Come on now! I've spent so long on your hair. It's not my fault that the curls aren't setting,' said Noor. Aliya paid her ten pounds less than what Noor had asked.

There were elements in this interaction that would never have happened with a white client – such as Noor raising her voice at the client, asking her not to irritate her, and eventually asking the client to go home with plastic rollers in her hair. However, this vignette shows that even in a service interaction where haggling was anticipated and informal care withheld, other kinds of informal care practices made an appearance. This client considered Noor a friend, as implied in the invitation to her home at the outset. In response to this proclamation of friendship, Noor asked Aliya about all her family members that she knew about and patiently listened to her stories.

Noor often confided in me how she found clients who wanted to be her friends harder to work on -- they demanded the emotional labour of a friend (remembering personal details, hearing their personal stories, advising on personal matters) while at the same time using friendship as an excuse not to pay the full price. There was, then, a performance of closeness on Noor's part in such interactions, although it was of a different order from the performance of intimacy with white clients. Here, the intimacy was based on cultural familiarity and understanding, and a sense of mutual solidarity between co-ethnics, if not 'true' friendship from the beautician's perspective. This is not to say that expressing sympathy for or empathy with South Asian clients required any less

emotional labour than hiding one's true feelings from white clients. Without creating a hierarchy of labour, if one were to study its implications for building intimacy, then the kind of labour beauticians invested in South Asian clients resembled friendship more closely. Therefore, it demonstrated that although service encounters where haggling took place were fraught from the perspective of the beautician, they might not have been experienced as lacking in intimacy by the client.

8.4.2. Reliance on an ethnic economy

Where Anita's Hair & Beauty owner Anita differed from Noor was her reliance on South Asian clientele. As 99% of Anita's clientele was South Asian, she was frequently vexed with their constant haggling. At Anita's salon, some South Asian women bargained after asking the price at the outset but most bargained at the time of paying after they had already received the service, which was something the beauticians already anticipated.

A middle-aged woman who spoke Gujarati with a smattering of Hindi came to the salon with her English-speaking daughter. The daughter had her hair cut while her mother got her hair coloured with henna. When they were about to leave, they asked, 'how much?' Although it was Rekha who had served them, she directed them to Anita for the payment. '£32,' said Anita, after adding the prices for the haircut and the colouring aloud. 'Here, take £30,' the woman handed Anita the money. 'I'll be coming back. You know I won't go anywhere else,' she added, suggesting that as she was a regular client it was not unreasonable to expect a concession. Anita did not resist. Later, Rekha said that she had anticipated the haggling, which is why she had left the transaction to Anita.

On another occasion, two teenage sisters walked in. One of them wanted a haircut and showed Anita a screenshot on her phone from the social media app, Tiktok. She wanted her hair to look exactly like the image on the phone. Anita discussed with the sisters how she could replicate that hairstyle – layers in front, a round cut in the back. 'How much?' the sisters asked. '£14,' said Anita, for what sounded like a fairly complicated and time-consuming haircut. 'So expensive!' the sisters cried out in unison. Anita gave them an exasperated look without saying anything. The sisters stood there for ten minutes discussing whether the likely result would justify the price. They spoke in Gujarati with each other, excluding Anita from the conversation. 'Can you make it less?' one of them finally asked in Hindi, provoking Anita to say, 'What are you going to ask for next? Give me a few chillies and

some coriander also for this price?' She was mimicking the way women speak to vegetable sellers in South Asia. Embarrassed, one of the girls sat down for the haircut.

Another example concerns a middle-aged Gujarati woman who came to the salon bearing a gift of an aloe vera leaf for Anita. Anita was happy to receive the gift and discussed the benefits of aloe vera with the client. During her manicure, the client gossiped about other Gujarati women in the neighbourhood. She particularly envied one woman who seemed to have found an ingenious way to earn money. Owner of a five-bedroom house, the woman apparently used all the rooms to grow young curry tree plants. She then sold each plant for £7.50, and they were in high demand amongst members of the Indian community who used the leaves for cooking. Anita pointed out that her client was not doing so badly herself, selling homemade hair-oil concoctions and handmade quilts for babies as well as running a marriage bureau for fellow Gujaratis. When she was about to leave, however, the client still drove a hard bargain. 'Aunty, you have plenty, no? Then why do this? If you didn't have money it would be a different matter,' said Anita, irritated. Despite what Anita said, the woman still paid two pounds less than the advertised price of the services provided.

Thus, haggling was as ubiquitous at Anita's Hair & Beauty as it was at Noor's. However, Anita did not compromise on care for her South Asian clients as presumably she was much more embedded in the ethnic economy than Noor.

> Nandita: You knew the area, so what was your expectation in terms of clientele?
>
> Anita: Look, you have to catch hold of local clients here. Locals, as you know, are Gujarati-speaking clients. Even among them, there are some picky ones who make a fuss about where they go. So, I wanted something that was neither too upmarket nor downmarket. When people come to my salon for the first time, they should feel like staying to get a service. Then they should feel like coming back as well. One woman came and said, 'I hadn't expected to find such a salon in [area]'. Now what does that mean? The other salons here are small and stuffy. The most important thing for a salon is hygiene. If we don't have money today, we will have it tomorrow. But hygiene and customer service should be nice.
>
> Nandita: Do you think white customers expect more customer service or care?

> Anita: No, everyone has the same expectations. How you serve a client depends on you. Sometimes a beautician looks at a client and thinks – 'what does she know? Let me do it quickly and send her away'. It shouldn't be that way. A customer is a customer for us –white or black or South Asian... They are all the same for us. Why should we pamper white clients more? Just because it's their country? I consider all my customers the same.

While Noor explicitly admitted that she would have liked to open her salon in a 'white' neighbourhood, Anita claimed to see all customers as being equal to her. As her clientele was nearly all South Asian, she cared for them just as she would do for white clients, providing both formal and informal care. At the same time, discursively, she conflated 'British' with 'white', relegating all non-white people to the status of outsiders. What followed was a process of racialisation whereby different traits were ascribed to clients of different ethnicities, positioning them in a discursive hierarchy. Just as at Noor's salon, white clients were deemed the best kind of clients in Anita's salon. South Asian clients were understood as women who haggled and did not appreciate the work of beauticians, although that did not make them second class clients in Anita's eyes as her business depended on them.

For both Anita and Noor, their relationship with South Asian clients, despite not being straightforward, was rooted in their affinity with them as co-ethnics. An informal credit system operated in both the salons wherein certain South Asian women were allowed to pay in instalments or at a later date after availing a service. Such a credit system recognised existing and ongoing relationships as well as financial hardship that many migrant women faced.

8.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that as soon as a client enters the South Asian salon, she is marked as white, black or 'our people'. White clients are constructed as the most attendable category of clients who deserve the highest degree of care on account of being knowledgeable, appreciative and generous. Although this attendability results in not challenging their views so as not to cause conflict or discomfort to them, beauticians simultaneously use these views and personal anecdotes to create moral boundaries between themselves and white clients. Therefore, even though white women are sought after and pampered as clients, the resultant intimacy is performative and situational in nature.

Black clients, on the other hand, are constructed as disattendable. By characterising black women as rude and dirty, the South Asian beautician justifies her own rudeness and lack of service. Diattendability thus forecloses the possibility of intimacy, creating the South Asian salon as a racist and unwelcoming space for black women. Far from being a novel phenomenon, this racism harks back to the early days of postcolonial migration to Britain. Writing nearly forty years ago about Black identity in Britain, when 'Black' was a political identity ascribed to all people of colour including South Asians, Winston James pointed out the antagonism between (South) Asians and Afro-Caribbean people in Britain:

> This state of affairs is of course a major obstacle to the maximisation of concerted action against British racism. There is a tendency among black radicals of both Asian and African descent to sweep this problem under the carpet. But to make a subject taboo, to repress it, is one thing; to make it disappear is quite another (James, 1986: 270).

This antagonism, still a taboo, nonetheless became evident in my research.

South Asian clients in the salon, despite their perceived shortcomings, are not deemed 'disattendable' because they are categorised as 'our women'. In criticising South Asian women as clients, a South Asian salon owner like Noor lays claim to an authentic understanding of how 'we' behave, taking on the role of the native anthropologist who writes about a culture from a 'position of native affinity' (Narayan, 1993: 671). Intimacy between South Asian clients and beauticians is based on cultural and experiential sameness and a belief in one's own ability to understand the familiar. Therefore, even though their undesirable traits are contrasted with the characteristics ascribed to white clients, South Asian clients are not constructed as 'disattendable'. The criticism South Asian salon owners make of South Asian clients is not an act of disavowal of the South Asian community but a recognition that they are business owners and that such penny-pinching is bad for their business. Criticising 'our people', therefore, does not diminish beauticians' loyalty towards them as clients, although it may diminish the imperative to 'care' for clients who have been offered a reduced price. Even in such cases, the client might place demands on the beautician for informal acts of care such as listening to details of the client's personal life and offering advice. Clients, thus, do not experience haggling as a barrier to intimacy, thereby upholding the value of the beauty salon as a diasporic space.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion

This thesis presents an exploration of two South Asian beauty salons in London as diasporic spaces for first-generation migrant women from South Asia. The questions I set out to answer were: To what extent and how can the South Asian beauty salon be understood as a diasporic space? What role does intimacy play in producing such a diasporic space? How are the boundaries of this diasporic space drawn? To answer these questions, I conducted an ethnography of two hair and beauty salons in London over a period of two years.

In this chapter, I aim to make sense of the findings of my study as a whole. In so doing, I hope to map out the kind of space constituted by the South Asian beauty salon in London. I will highlight the contributions I believe I have made to the existing literatures on intimacy, diasporic space and beauty salons, in part by bringing these three distinct literatures together under one 'heading' in this study. I will also discuss the implications of this research and its limitations, as well as some questions that could usefully be investigated by future research on this subject.

9.1. Discussion of thesis findings

9.1.1. Through intimacy to diasporic space

This thesis has highlighted how the various kinds of intimacies created in two neighbourhood South Asian beauty salons make them diasporic spaces for first-generation migrant women from South Asia in London. The findings indicate that intimacy between women in the beauty salon is created on the basis of the shared sociality of beauty. In Chapter 3, I showed how, despite their reinforcing normative ideas of femininity, the emotions generated from beauty also brought women together. While this kind of intimacy emanating from beauty could be possible in any kind of beauty salon, anywhere, the diasporic context was especially relevant to the production of intimacy at Anita's Hair & Beauty and Noor's Hair & Beauty. The ways in which the women in question experienced beauty -- as escape from domestic routine, as a source of fantasy and imagination, or as upward mobility – could not be separated from their class background and histories of migration. Much like the pleasure of beauty, the pain it produced was also gendered in the beauty salon, as beauticians often drew parallels between the pain of beauty and the pain of giving birth. Thus, for clients, taking part in the pain and pleasure of beauty in the company of other women engendered a feeling of what

others have called 'girlfriendship' – a form of female sociality that enables normative femininity. This gave rise to intimacy between the beautician and the client as well as between clients.

When women come together in an all-women's space, they talk about things aside from beauty that may help them formulate collective resistance to traditional gender norms. This is what I have termed gender intimacy in Chapter 4. This kind of intimacy was enacted in the two salons through the modalities of women's talk and practical acts of support. The beauty salon can be an ideal site for gender intimacy as it produces a discourse of female agency and autonomy by enabling leisure practices among women. Even in the context of gendered sisterhood, the help and support women in these salons provided each other was specific to the contexts in which they found themselves – far away from networks of family and friends, trying to navigate life in a new country. From how and where to seek support if facing abuse in marriage to how to get children enrolled in school, they found an opportunity to meet other migrant women like themselves and seek advice on these matters in the beauty salon. It emerged as a common narrative in both the salons that after migration, many South Asian women found themselves faced with having to participate in paid employment as well as taking care of household responsibilities single-handedly. Such challenges to be overcome made them turn to each other in the beauty salon for advice on how to get their husbands to share domestic responsibilities, leading to what I have called 'gender intimacy'.

The beauty salon is produced not just as an all-women's space but also as a diasporic space. In Chapter 5 I described the homemaking practices that produce ethnic intimacy in the beauty salon. At Anita's and Noor's salons, the salon owners and beauticians intentionally created a South Asian atmosphere through the use of language, food and music that produced a sense of familiarity and belonging for South Asian clients. The sights, smells and sounds that might be stigmatised in other public spaces were welcome in the two salons. Clients too played a role in the production of ethnic intimacy by asserting their South Asian identity through the use of South Asian languages and consumption of aromatic food in the space of the salon. As a consequence, both Noor's Hair & Beauty and Anita's Hair & Beauty drew a predominantly South Asian clientele who felt at home in the salons. As part of ethnic intimacy, I have specifically looked at elements that have the potential to bring together various South Asian communities through highlighting the common aspects of their culture, such as shared language, cuisine and music, thereby enabling the articulation of a South Asian identity.

Thus, the neighbourhood beauty salon as a diasporic space has the potential to bring together South Asian women of different nationalities. As noted in Chapter 3, South Asian diasporic communities show commitment to the diasporic project by recreating South Asian culture in diverse locations (Brubaker, 2005; Finlay, 2019). They use the resources available to them to cultivate a 'strategic sense of belonging and inclusion' (Jazeel, 2006: 31). In this thesis I have showed how the neighbourhood beauty salon run by South Asian women cultivates sociality and belonging through the production of diasporic intimacy.

9.1.2. Intimacy and boundary making

This thesis has attempted to study intimacy in a spatial context. By studying the beauty salon through the lens of intimacy I have been able to analyse how it is produced as a diasporic space. In addition, however, to identifying the practices of intimacy that produce the beauty salon as South Asian, we have to understand how intimacy goes hand in hand with what we could call 'boundary work'. The diasporic space represented by the South Asian beauty salon is nonetheless circumscribed by boundaries. That is, the relations of sociality produced in this diasporic space are not equally accessible to everyone. At any given time, some women are better positioned than others to engage with this diasporic space on account of shared language, religion, caste, food practices or cultural referents. The intimacies generated in this diasporic space are fraught, as a result of which the diasporic space produced is contested. For example, while gendered intimacy and solidarity are readily available to first-generation South Asian women in the salon who conform to the ideals of femininity, women who exercise their sexuality outside of marriage or consume alcohol may be excluded from intimacy. The same woman might be able to take part in the diasporic space while listening to Bollywood music on the radio but may be excluded from it when she complains too much about the pain of hair removal. Thus, unstable intimacies produce a situational diasporic space in the South Asian beauty salon.

Such a diasporic space is characterised by 'exclusionary sociability' (Brøgger, 2019: 102). I have shown in this thesis how exclusion may be direct or indirect. Direct exclusion is exemplified by upper-caste vegetarian Hindus expressing disgust at the meat-eating practices of marginalised-caste Hindus as well as Muslims at Anita's salon or Noor refusing to hire Muslim women in her salon who belong to the Ahmaddiya sect. Indirect exclusion, on the other hand, works by simply not

representing the characteristics of groups that do not belong in a certain place. Places codify membership by normalising certain values and ways of seeing the world. This becomes evident in the exclusion of Muslims from Anita's Hair & Beauty.

The ethnic intimacy that I observed in the South Asian beauty salon revealed itself to be religious in nature. In Chapter 6, I looked at how religious intimacy was produced in the two salons through religious artefacts, rituals and conversations. While, as researcher, I was able to identify this form of intimacy as religious, this does not mean that the participants necessarily viewed the sacred as set aside from the secular. At both Noor's and Anita's salons, everyday life seemed to be seamlessly integrated with religion such that religion appeared mere common sense. This was most evident in conversations between religious women that centred on religious festivals, fasts and practices. Thus, on a closer examination, many of the elements that created ethnic intimacy were shown to be religious.

While this creates tension between ethnic intimacy and religious intimacy, I take them both to be unstable categories that may overlap. This betrays the fractures in any possible articulation of a stable South Asian identity. Salon owners, beauticians and clients mobilised both ethnic and religious intimacies, contingent on the situation and the actors involved. For example, the mention of a samosa could make both Hindu and Muslim South Asians nostalgic, engendering ethnic intimacy. The filling of the samosa – lamb or potatoes – could go on to create boundaries between vegetarian Hindus and halal meat-eating Muslims, bringing us to the question of religious intimacy. Thus, while ethnic intimacy has the potential to bring South Asian communities together, religious intimacy creates a differential sense of belonging, enabling it for some while restricting it for others.

Religious intimacy was also what marked the two salons as different from each other. With a small altar with Hindu deities, religious totems, Hindu worship rituals and devotional music, Anita's Hair & Beauty was produced as a Hindu space. In contrast, a copy of the Quran in the reception, framed Quranic verses on the walls, sounds of recitations of Quran and religious conversations produced Noor's Hair & Beauty as a Muslim space. Within these spaces, internal hierarchies operated leading to discriminatory practices by upper caste vegetarian Hindus and Muslims of the dominant Sunni sect.

As the two salons were located in the super-diverse context of London, it was also imperative to deal with the question of race. Chapter 8, Contingent Intimacy, looked at the difficulty of establishing intimacy with the racial other and the acts of boundary making that foreclose intimacy with white and black clients in the South Asian beauty salon. Such a foreclosure of intimacy produces the beauty salon as an ethnically homogeneous space. However, situational intimacies can be produced between South Asian beauticians and black or white clients as well, when spurred by the demands of commerce. Even with South Asian clients, intimacies are not straightforward but dictated by commercial transactions and considerations.

In Chapter 2, I identified three characteristics of diasporic space as reflected in existing literature: they demonstrate migrant agency; they are segregated by gender, class and religion; and they reveal inner conflicts in the diasporic community. I have demonstrated in this thesis how these characteristics manifest in the South Asian beauty salon.

9.2. Contribution to scholarship

My doctoral study has used a novel approach to study South Asian migrants in the UK. Instead of studying a particular community of first-generation migrant women, undertaking an ethnography of a specific space can reveal so much about migration, migrant labour, and translocal practices of diasporic placemaking as well as the creation and maintenance of boundaries. This approach has been particularly useful in studying the highly heterogeneous South Asian diaspora, members of which have rarely been studied as a single social group in the UK. It is by taking a spatial approach to this group that I found that intimate communities are formed around shared religious identity and practice rather than boundaries of nation-states. Similarly, the anti-black racism in the South Asian diaspora also revealed itself to me through a study of space. I do not think that the attitudes of first-generation South Asian migrant women towards racial or religious others would have become apparent through a more conventional community study rather than an ethnography of a given space. Thus, my study has illustrated how a sustained ethnography of place can contribute to migration scholarship.

My contribution to the burgeoning literature on beauty salons has been to show that beauty salons need not be studied only through the lens of beauty norms, practices and femininity. A beauty salon in a diasporic context acts as a productive site for the study of a number of social processes that are

of interest to migration scholars. A space of women's sociality is a multi-dimensional space that warrants scholarly attention for its potential to reveal how macro processes manifest in everyday life. For example, the study of everyday life in the beauty salon in my research enabled an understanding of how food and language act as both registers of intimacy and boundary making in the diaspora. While the act of sharing homecooked food in the salon can create intimacy between women, food also becomes the marker of religion and caste, alienating those who are thought of as having inferior food practices. Similarly, while speaking in a common South Asian language engenders intimacy between South Asian women in the salon, the same act in the presence of a black woman becomes a means of exclusion.

I hope that this study has also established the uniqueness of the South Asian salon in the UK. Paula Black (2004) classified UK's hair and beauty salons as those catering to white women, African-Caribbean women and South Asian women. This thesis has shed light on salons that cater to South Asian women in the UK. While beauty salons have mostly been studied as women's spaces in particular locales, the approach in my study has illustrated the value of a beauty salon run by migrant women that caters to other migrant women. During my recent visits to India, I could not help but notice the changing nature of the neighbourhood beauty salon. As neighbourhood salons in Indian cities become more 'westernised' by adopting modern interiors, standardised and sanitised aesthetics that include ambient instrumental music and beauticians in uniform, it is worth recognising the neighbourhood South Asian beauty salon in the diaspora as a unique institution. In trying to create a sense of familiarity and resemblance with salons in their homeland based on their memories of what salons looked like before they migrated, migrant entrepreneurs have created establishments where South Asian women can reaffirm a sense of their ethnic identity by displaying and performing it for the benefit of the insider's gaze (Fortier, 2006).

By using intimacy as an analytical framework, I have depicted the beauty salon as a space that blurs the boundaries between the economic and the intimate. In the beauty salon, intimacy enters into market relations to be bought, sold and consumed (Constable, 2009). As both the sellers and consumers of this intimacy are transnational migrants, it is clear, too, how the global and the intimate are profoundly intertwined (Pratt & Rosner, 2012). Both Anita's and Noor's salons were sites of commerce as well as of physical and emotional intimacy, where intimate relationships were developed and nurtured through migrant women's labour. Thus, this thesis has shown how an

intimate diasporic space is formed when migrant workers perform intimate labour for their co-ethnics in the diaspora.

This intimacy, in a way, is also responsible for sustaining migrant-owned beauty salons as businesses. As small enterprises that draw workers from the same pool of first-generation migrant women to which they also cater as service-providers, the South Asian beauty salon is fuelled by migrant labour and in turn generates employment opportunities for women who cannot access the formal labour market due to lack of language skills and formal qualifications.

Finally, this thesis has demonstrated how a study can employ intersectionality in a more nuanced fashion than is often the case. I have sought to show 'what intersectionality does, rather than what intersectionality is' (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013: 795). An intersectional lens has helped me foreground how a diasporic space can mean different things to different South Asian women, depending on their religious, caste and class locations. Although my thesis has been informed by intersectionality throughout, in understanding how social realities are lived, an intersectional framework has particularly strengthened the analyses in chapter 4 and 8. In Chapter 4, I showed how beauty means different things to women depending on their social location in terms of class, race and migration history. In Chapter 8, the entanglements of race and class have helped me understand the differential treatments accorded to clients.

9.3. Why this study is important

I hope that this study has successfully dealt with some of the challenges of representing migrants. I have long felt a sense of discomfort with how even some of the most well-meaning scholars attach victimhood to migrants from the global south. In much scholarly literature, migrants are represented as victims of their circumstances and of global processes such as racial capitalism. The conceptualisation of research on migrant communities and topics of investigation chosen in relation to migrants end up highlighting their misery so much so that it begins to seem like pleasure, intimacy and leisure can have no place in their lives. This thesis, then, is the product of an endeavour to portray migrants in all their complexity and humanity. Affording migrants full humanity also involves being able to write about how first-generation migrants tend to reproduce hierarchies and discriminatory practices from their countries of origin. In that regard, I have tried to produce a

faithful portrait offering a nuanced and layered portrayal of first-generation migrant women from South Asia in London.

The crisis of representation plagues Muslim migrant women in particular. Much of the existing literature places them in familial and domestic roles, rendering invisible their participation in the labour market (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). Representations of South Asian women, particularly Muslim women, in academic and popular literature are often dominated by discussions of religion, culture and experiences of gender-based violence (Anitha & Gill, 2015). In focusing on a Muslim hair and beauty salon in London, this thesis has portrayed migrant Muslim women from Pakistan and Afghanistan as business owner and beauty workers. I have theorised the Muslim-owned beauty salon as a space where Muslim women can enjoy leisure and sociality without compromising on respectability. Salon owner Noor supports women to become financially independent, given the Muslim women's low rate of participation in the labour market. She uses a religious discourse concerning the rights granted to women in Islam to nudge them to leave abusive marriages, informing them of the ways they can seek support should they decide to do so.

While on the topic of representation, I have stopped to wonder if my thesis contributes to the stereotype of first-generation migrant women from South Asia as self-segregating and confining themselves to ethnic enclaves. A diasporic space such as the beauty salon is helpful to first-generation migrants with low educational attainment and level of English who can, for example, learn English while making a living, meet other migrant women who have been in the UK longer and have familiarised themselves with British institutions, and seek advice on matters related to school admissions, job search and social welfare. A diasporic space allows women from the working class a space of sociality within which they can learn how to participate in British institutions of health, housing and politics. It can be counterproductive to social cohesion when migrant women do not have access to such spaces where they can learn things at their own pace in familiar environments and without making it *seem* as though they are learning – indeed, they are not, explicitly, there to learn. Therefore, this study makes a critical contribution by demonstrating how first-generation South Asian women create local embeddedness and belonging in London for themselves, and presumably, their families.

The work of ethnography is to explicate 'how broader social dynamics are made real and given particular inflections in the everyday' (Herbert, 2000: 561). Concerns have been expressed over the dismissal of common South Asian activities and desecularisation of South Asian spaces in the UK (Bhatt, 2000). While the term (South) 'Asian' signified a secular orientation during the early phases of South Asian migration to the UK in the 1960s and 70s, the contemporary demarcation of South Asian groups on the basis of religious categories marks a break from the history of those decades (*ibid.*). It was fascinating to me how this broader trend was reflected in my study of South Asian beauty salons, highlighting an emphasis on the construction of religious difference over the many cultural similarities between Hindu and Muslim communities from South Asia, bolstered by the current political discourse in India as well as in the UK. This makes this study particularly timely and relevant, considering the current climate of Hindu-Muslim tensions in the UK as evidenced in the Leicester riots of 2022.

Finally, while on the topic of representation, it is important to dissect the role that my 'insider' position played in conducting this ethnography. The findings in Chapter 8, Contingent Intimacy, made me the most uncomfortable in this regard. I doubt that anti-black comments would have been made so openly in the presence of a non-South Asian researcher. Although I was aware of anti-black racism in the South Asian diaspora, initially such incidents used to shock me into silence. I might therefore inadvertently have 'blended' in to my research surroundings in more ways than one, creating an impression through my silence that I shared such views. My subsequent silence was also strategic as in my observer role I wanted to observe and note what was happening around me instead of trying to intervene. Admittedly, I also felt ill equipped to intervene. But I wonder if through my presence and silence, I became complicit in these encounters. Similarly, my visible identity as a Hindu woman (even though I am non-practising) might have played a role in the Islamophobic language I became privy to. In this case, however, I felt much more at ease initiating discussions and challenging the participants' views as this was something I was accustomed to doing with family and friends back in India.

At the same time, by using my complicity to then write about encounters involving the participants as racist or Islamophobic, I wonder if I can be accused of deceiving 'our people' or 'washing our dirty linen in public'. Have I played a role in stigmatising a racialised minority?

Pointing to anti-black or anti-Muslim sentiments in South Asian beauty salons in this thesis is not something I have done in the spirit of taking the moral high ground vis-à-vis the participants in my research. In that regard, I am also uncomfortable with how research and writing tend to 'fix' people in their depictions at a certain point in time. People can educate themselves and change their worldviews over time. Many hopeful conversations did take place in the workshops I conducted in the salons once my fieldwork had ended. For ethical reasons, those conversations could not be included in this thesis as they were neither recorded nor part of the formal study.

Although the act of representation through writing is bound to fail, ethnographers must aspire to better kinds of failure (Back, 2007). This involves 'being open to the complexities and incomplete nature of present-tense experience, while at the same time avoiding reduction, fixing and closure (Back, 2007: 94). I have tried to do just that by presenting the participants in my research, especially the salon owners, as complex human beings. While I hope that this study will contribute to the understanding of first-generation South Asian migrant women in the UK, I also wish to acknowledge that it reflects a particular perspective at a particular historical moment.

9.4. Limitation of the study

Having underlined the contributions of this study, I now look at its biggest limitation in my view - which also serves as a basis for future research. While the strength of this study is that it captures the events and processes taking place in two neighbourhood South Asian beauty salons, it is also its limitation. In order for the ethnography of a place to generate holistic data about the behaviour of a migrant community, a multi-sited ethnography would have been more productive. While I analyse people's behaviour and opinions as expressed in the beauty salon, I can only speak to its veracity in the space of Anita's and Noor's salons. I do not know whether their behaviour and speech change or remain the same once they are out the door of the beauty salon. While I enjoyed the opportunity to spend extended periods with the salon owners and beauticians, during which I could both ask them questions and analyse their speech and actions, clients only spent short periods of time in the beauty salon. Theorisation based on having observed clients in the beauty salon only for short periods of time is something of a risky undertaking. I would have liked to accompany and observe people in different places for extended periods, which was not possible within the scope of this project. Ideally, a multi-sited ethnography of first-generation migrant women looking at different spaces that they

inhabit and spend time in -- such as workplaces and religious sites -- can yield a richer and more complex account of their lives.

9.5. Final thoughts

As this was a study of South Asian diasporic space where I found both female solidarity and exclusionary practices, I wish to end with a reflection on what an ideal women's diaspora space might look like. Or, the question that feminist scholars have forever grappled with: how can women build solidarities across difference? I found the beauty salon as a diasporic space for women to be a feminist space, too. While it was not perfect, it did engender a sense of empowerment, confidence and solidarity among women. The fact that some women were excluded from these forms of solidarity, then, is troubling from a feminist perspective. It is a limitation of solidarity that it tends to operate by creating boundaries between an 'us' to whom it can be extended and a 'them' who stand in contrast to us (Rorty, 1989).

But imagination can take on a crucial role in thinking beyond these boundaries to extend our solidarity to those who are different from us (Kavanagh, 2020). It is possible to show 'imaginative empathy' to those whose experiences are different from ours by imagining what it must be like to be in their place (Betzler & Keller, 2021). Even where the coherence and stability of a group depends on shared norms, practices and sense of belonging, empathy can be used to bring outsiders into the group. An ideal diasporic space for women, then, would be one where empathy can be made available to all kinds of women, irrespective of race, religion and caste, even if they don't share in the same experiences of gender and diasporic intimacy. In conclusion, as bell hooks puts it:

> Women do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity. We do not need to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression. We do not need anti-male sentiments to bond us together, so great is the wealth of experience, culture, and ideas we have to share with one another. We can be sisters united by shared interests and beliefs, united in our appreciation for diversity, united in our struggle to end sexist oppression, united in political solidarity (hooks, 1986: 138).

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