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1

Practices, Identification and Identity Change in the Transition to Motherhood

Heather Elliott, Yasmin Gunaratnam, Wendy Hollway and Ann Phoenix

Identity transformation is of major concern in the social sciences (Brooks and Wee, 2008), but there is currently little agreement about the processes through which it occurs. This chapter illustrates the ways in which processes of identity change can be theoretically accounted for by analysing the ways in which Silma (a pseudonym), a first-time mother of Bangladeshi parentage, engages in practices that demonstrate to herself and others that she can successfully 'do' motherhood. The chapter can therefore serve to illuminate, and contribute to understanding the role of practices in identity transformation more generally. In summary, using vignettes from one case, we aim to provide a psychosocial account of the identity transitions involved in becoming a mother, highlighting how practices, of many different kinds, are vehicles for identifications, investments in motherhood and identity change.

When women become mothers, they face the challenges associated with having primary responsibility for caring for a dependent and vulnerable infant. They do so in contexts laden with historical and cultural meanings within which they have to find ways of making sense of their unique experiences of becoming mothers. This simultaneity of the historical-cultural determination of what it means to be a mother and the unique first-timeness of the experience mean that new motherhood identities should not be understood simply as pre-given and externally produced, but as developed and creatively made by mothers themselves out of the social, material and psychic resources available in their external settings, their relationships, their life histories and current experiences. In this chapter, therefore, we adopt a psychosocial approach to the puzzle of how mothers craft motherhood as both

cultural and personal by giving equal analytic weight to social and psychological processes in the transition to motherhood.

Silma is one of our sample of first-time mothers living in Tower Hamlets, a borough in the East End of London. Through vignettes and interview extracts from her case, we aim to provide a psychosocial account of the identity transitions involved in becoming a mother, highlighting common themes in our sample concerning how practices, of many different kinds, are vehicles for identifications, investments in motherhood and identity change. She was interviewed three times: a week after her daughter Abeedah's birth, then six months later and finally a few weeks after Abeedah's first birthday. Our research questions reflected several theoretical frameworks that can inform an understanding of identity processes: we wanted to know about women's experiences of becoming mothers, how dimensions of social difference such as ethnicity, religion, culture, age and class impacted on their changing identities and how they were positioned and positioned themselves in expert discourses that were made available through health and social services and the media.

The first interview focused on the story and meanings of the pregnancy as well as the birth, while the second was about events, changes and experiences since birth and the mothers' evolving identities as babies became more able to control their bodies and interact with people and objects. The final interview focused on changes for the mothers, babies and their social networks since the second interview. At each interview the questions were designed to elicit 'experience-near' accounts of specific life events in the sequence and wording of the interviewee as unimpeded as possible by the structure of the interview agenda.

There is a preference, in social science, for studying a sufficient number of cases to allow analysis of cross-case patterns. The use of vignettes from a single case thus runs the risk of dismissal as idiosyncratic and not generalisable. Our paradigm for making more general conclusions is not based on statistical generalisability, or on a cross-case comparative methodology. Our approach is one of extrapolating general principles from a single case in three ways: by the sustained testing of theoretical concepts against the data, by inductively analysing narrative themes produced by a particular mother and interviewer and by contextualising these in the available literature and in what other mothers in similar and different circumstances say. The limits to generalisability are sought in theory, in other empirical studies, and by carefully situating the meaning and relevance of our evidence in its particular social and

interactional contexts (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998). Careful attention to setting requires, and allows, us to locate the meaning of data within the wider case, without isolating data fragments from their context.

Since 'identity' is not transparent to the person experiencing a transition, this has implications for method, as does our emphasis on relationality in theorising identity (Hollway, 2008, 2009). We wanted to avoid eliciting accounts that drew on generalising discourses about identity and motherhood and we avoided reference to 'identity' both in recruitment and in data production. The methods used in this study¹ aimed to allow the expression of multiplicity, complexity and contradiction and to allow access to experiences including the unsaid and the unsayable as well as what is spoken (Frosh, 2002). We therefore used an evolving form of the Free Association Narrative Interview method, designed to elicit accounts expressed in participants' own words and follow up their trains of thought in any way that came to mind (i.e. free associations, Hollway and Jefferson, 2000).

Our theoretical focus here is upon practices, performativity and identifications. The overarching concepts that contribute to this exploration are broadly as follows. We examine how identity can be produced and claimed through repeated everyday embodied routines and unconscious practices (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990) and how the transition to motherhood is a period when new routines of childcare have to be established and some other routine practices are likely to be disrupted and questioned.

We highlight how everyday mothering practices are identity practices that are always in process, rather than achieved (de Marneffe, 2006; Baraitser, 2006a, 2006b). Early motherhood is a time when identity can get noticed and worked upon by mothers and those around them, uncovering the iteration of gendered and cultural norms that are brought to life and reconfigured through routinised discursive and material performances (Butler, 1990). These accounts of practice can be rendered psychosocial by addressing the ways that this new mother's internal world (fashioned from a life history of prior experiences) and her external world (the social and material features that structure her current experiences) play mutual parts in how she responds to the demands of being a mother.

Silma in context

The population of Tower Hamlets is ethnically mixed. Fifty-one per cent is white, from a variety of ethnic groups, with Bangladeshi people

constituting the largest ethnic group (at 33% on the 2001 Census, in comparison with 0.5% in England and Wales). Most are Muslim by religious background (with 36% of the Tower Hamlets population enumerated as Muslim, ONS, 2001). Many Bangladeshi young people are British born, as are some of their parents. A growing number of young professionals, largely white, live in the newly developed areas close to the City, the financial district of London (Dench and Gavron, 2006).

The area is unique in terms of its physical and socio-economic geography. It is ranked in the top 5 most deprived local authorities in England in terms of its residents. It includes the office district of Canary Wharf and therefore receives large numbers of relatively affluent incomers daily. At a neighbourhood scale it is a complex mosaic of small pockets of recently developed affluence in close proximity to areas of high deprivation. Pressure on land for development is high so the urban landscape is dynamic.

(InstantAtlas, 2006)

Bangladeshi populations in the United Kingdom are characterised by high levels of ill health, low educational achievement, unemployment and poverty (Salway *et al.*, 2007). The Government's Equalities Review (Equalities Review Panel, 2007) has identified Bangladeshi and Pakistani women as socially and economically disadvantaged, with especially low rates of employment, qualifications and work experience:

The majority of inactive Pakistani and Bangladeshi women say they do not want to work because they are looking after the family and home. ... There is evidence that the reasons for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women's employment penalty arises from a belief that good motherhood involves staying at home and providing their own childcare.

(Equalities Review Panel, 2007, pp. 100–101)

The report also highlighted the 'penalties' faced by mothers of young children in these groups 'in terms of limited career progression, large pay gaps and discrimination' (op cit., p. 9). Silma's mother was diagnosed with cancer, three months after Silma's baby was born. She was one of the three Bangladeshi grandmothers in our sample who were seriously ill or who had died before their grandchild was born (this was the case for only one of our non-Bangladeshi interviewees). As we shall see, this had implications for Silma's mothering career. Whilst recognising

this wider context, we do not wish to deploy Silma's ethno-religious identity in culturalist or racialising ways which essentialise, ignore a plurality of positioning and obscure agency and possibilities for transformation (Phillips, 2007). Rather, we aim to highlight the specificity of the circumstances in which mothers mother and the variety of individual experiences *within* social and cultural practices as women come to inhabit motherhood identities.

Silma became a mother in Tower Hamlets during a period of government investment in early years services (the borough was home to six Sure Start programmes, developed to improve the life chances of young children and families) and concern about local maternity services (Tower Hamlets PCT and Barts and the London NHS Trust, 2007). Tower Hamlets had been targeted in the terrorist attacks of July 2005 and the impact was still reverberating through the borough when Abeedah was born the following year. A focus group discussion conducted with some Bangladeshi mothers in Tower Hamlets alongside the research project found that many valued the multiculturalism of the borough and the numbers and visibility of other Bangladeshis and/or Muslims. For some Bangladeshi mothers the 'comfort' of Tower Hamlets was also related to concerns about hostility towards Muslims following the terrorist attacks in London (Gunaratnam and Elliott, 2007). Silma talked of being 'comfortable' in Tower Hamlets and much of her day-to-day life since becoming a mother was conducted locally. Her preference for staying local was shared by many of the mothers in our sample, particularly the Bangladeshi and white working-class mothers, reflecting the significance of the domestic sphere and proximity to extended families during their babies' first year.

Silma, one of nine Bangladeshi mothers in our study, is one of seven siblings. She gave birth to Abeedah at 24 years of age. She was, therefore, younger than the national average age of first-time mothers (27 years at the time), as were most of our group of mothers. Like the rest of the Bangladeshi women in our sample, she was already married when she became pregnant (only two of the other ten mothers were). She was one of five women living with their husbands' families of origin when her child was born (having done so since she married a year previously), and one of three still living with her in-laws a year later. At the time of our interviews Silma was living with her husband and Abeedah in her mother-in-law's council house, which was also home to her brother-in-law's family. She was one of ten working-class women in our sample (an assessment based on her occupation and her qualification for local authority accommodation). She had worked in a department

store before she became pregnant but resigned when she experienced severe morning sickness and, in common with nearly two-thirds of our sample (11 of 19), was not employed a year after giving birth.

Negotiating and embodying conflictual performative practices

Drawing upon the work of Bourdieu, we theorise practice as an improvised bodily art-form and know-how, deriving not only from conscious aims and goals but also from how 'the body thinks for us'. In Silma's case our concern with practices includes an engagement with the ways in which Silma holds Abeedah, communicates with her, changes her nappy and feeds her, how she moves around and occupies the spaces of her shared home and how she dresses. Such 'practical sense' is defined by Bourdieu, as the capacity to 'habilement' (skilfully, expertly, adroitly) resolve the small challenges of everyday life, with regard to what is appropriate in a given time and place (our translation). So while practice may feel like 'second nature' (1990: 56) and be characterised by 'what goes without saying' (1990: 92), it is also produced by, expressive of and attuned to the cultural, the social and the realistic ('appropriate'). While appearing to be 'natural', Bourdieu's work suggests that taken-for-granted practices have to be worked out, learned and routinised. For new mothers, the process of routinisation of childcare tasks is often anxiety provoking and, initially, requires planning and thought until they become practised.

Bourdieu's work on practice raises questions about where first-time practices come from, such as those involved in new mothering. For instance, Silma was initially nervous about her lack of experience and knowledge of mothering and relied on the expertise available in hospital and from women in her family. Yet, Bourdieu's notion of practice also suggests how the unconscious – which for Bourdieu is 'never anything other than the forgetting of history' (1990: 56) – can produce a sort of incorporated learning from individual experience that makes practices feel like second nature.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, when a woman becomes a mother she can access dormant infantile experiences from when she was a baby, embodied experience that incorporates her own mother's handling. Through unconscious identification with this early mother, she can be attuned to her baby's needs without conscious knowledge. According to Winnicott,

because she is devoted to her infant, [the mother] is able to make active adaptation. This presupposes (...) an understanding of the individual infant's way of life, which again arises out of *her capacity for identification* with her infant. This relationship between the mother and the infant starts before the infant is born.

(1949: 189 our emphasis)

The psychoanalytic concept of unconscious dynamics thus works on a relational, rather than individual, terrain.

In their debate about the psychological work involved in the transformation of women into mothers, Baraitser (2006a, 2006b) and De Marneffe (2006) draw on Butler's notions of performativity to highlight how new mothers mimic practices already saturated with meaning, re-working them until they make them their own:

In taking on motherhood, we don, like a wig, an array of sedimented ideas about who we are without having the slightest notion – yet – of who we ourselves are as mothers. We 'mime' motherhood, we act the part, and the part requires the adoption of certain roles – caretaker, diaper changer, breastfeeder, walker-of -the-floors at night – which are saturated with ideological and historical meanings about mothering, womanhood, nurturing, self-sacrifice, and so on... a new mother's life is narrowed to a repetitive round of care-giving tasks and a constricted universe of preoccupations. But it is what she does with those conditions, in their specificity and in the new, creative relation with her child, that gives rise to her individual experience of mothering.

(de Marneffe, 2006: 248)

De Marneffe's depiction aptly fits Silma's account of the initial strangeness of her new mothering identity as well as the process by which she starts to make it her own. Silma describes her return home from hospital with her daughter thus.

When I was coming out the car, yeah, they were all at the door. (...) And then um (.) (softer) then I was thinking, 'What shall I do?' I was a bit nervous. Then I had to make her milk, and then I fed her, changed her nappy, changed her clothes and put her to sleep. (louder) And then I used to like look at the clock every time, it was like (softer) three hours (louder) every three hours. But then she's drinking little by little bit, so it's like every two to two and a half hours actually.

In de Marneffe's sense, she 'acts the part' of a mother (and is seen to 'act the part' by her extended family, all gathered at the door), for example by following the professional advice given to her in the hospital. However, her repetitive performance (conveyed by the repeated 'and then') of feeding her baby gives her confidence that she is expert enough to improvise and to depart from the guidance. When the first interview takes place, five days after she has brought Abeedah home, she has already reworked and personalised her feeding practices in what de Marneffe suggests is a 'creative relation' with her daughter:

Because I'm there with her 24/7 and feeding her, changing her nappy, even when she's asleep I get the milk ready for it to be um at least a little hot to warm. Um and I find now, her nappy changing, I just do it quickly before she starts struggling like this, I know her nappy changing time, and I keep on like looking at her, even if she sleep(...) She does it bit by bit, and when I open her nappy she just wees(...). So I'm waiting for her to wee at the same time as well. (...) She gives me a signal.

Winnicott observed how, for the early weeks of the new infant's life, most mothers enter a preoccupied state of heightened sensitivity, lasting a few weeks, for which he coined the term 'primary maternal preoccupation' (1956). The mother emerges 'as the infant releases her' (1956: 302). This state is one in which identifications with the infant and intense love dominate over usual preoccupations. Silma illustrates the intensity of early mothering as she carries out the same tasks over and over again, day in day out ('I'm there with her 24/7'). For some mothers this 'narrowing' of life (de Marneffe, 2006: 248) is claustrophobic (Baraitser, 2006a), but Silma stresses how she becomes a mother as the everyday tasks of motherhood become part of her practice and she forges a unique connection with her baby through this work. In coming to know her baby intimately, she knows herself to be a mother. In this sense, identifications with infants can provide the attentive attunement necessary to meet the needs of a new baby who cannot yet communicate verbally. This process can also potentially be facilitated by mothers' conscious identifications with their own mothers since this provides them with ideas for how to perform the practices of motherhood. In Silma's case, the fact that she has a much younger sister means that she has seen her own mother's mothering practices at close quarters and has also helped to care for her sister. Her conscious and unconscious identifications meant that she had an internalised relationship to draw on

or mimic as she began learning to 'do' motherhood through her own mothering practices.

Trying to understand how the world is brought to life and activated by what Silma does as a mother brings us to the idea of practice as performative of identity. Feminist scholarship on performativity (stimulated by Butler, 1990, 1993, 1997) has emphasised how identity can be made and unmade through the repetition of practices and discourses. This conceptual framework is psychosocial in that 'the script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but [which] requires individual actors in order to be actualised and reproduced as reality once again' (Butler, 1997: 409). A recognition of practice as performativity in Silma's case means that we are interested in the particular configurations of identity 'scripts' in her life – as culture, gender, faith, generation and class – and how her unique biography affects and is affected by the choices she makes in whether and how she enacts these scripts. For example, clothes can be taken as a literal performance of identity (Puwar, 2004), yet they can also represent a playing with, a dipping into and a miming of identifications, orientated to the demands of varying and changing social settings rather than being consistent over time. Here we can grasp the playfulness, temporality and multiplicity of some performed practices.

In reflecting on features of her current changes, Silma described her old self as 'so wild', out with friends all the time, staying out late. Now, she says, 'I've gone a bit mature, more understanding, like a more motherly type'. She is 'around family more'. 'Strangely', she says, this has affected her clothes-wise, having been a 'jeans maniac', she now feels less comfortable in them and refers to *shalwar kameez* as 'normal clothes' and 'the ones I really like' (she received four sets as birthday gifts). That she finds this change 'strange' suggests that it is either not something that she has consciously chosen but that she has discovered in her changed preferences or that she sees it as sufficiently discontinuous with her previous preferences to require marking for the interviewer. Silma's reported new preference can be read as marking a new set of identifications, one that also includes spending more time at home and socialising with her aunts rather than her younger sisters and friends. Using clothes to symbolise her changing status as closer to the women in her mother's generation than her sisters' is a way for Silma to stake a claim to a motherhood identity and to vacate some aspects of more youthful identifications. Yet Silma mentions that she sometimes wears jeans when she goes out and also that she goes out to meet her friends in Pizza Hut and McDonalds. The new embodied practice of wearing

shalwar kameez thus seems to be a domestic 'performance', where Silma chooses to follow a cultural 'script' in ways that facilitate her inclusion by her aunts and contribute to the way she occupies the motherhood identity she has long desired.

This analysis suggests that Silma's performative dress practices are instrumental and consciously chosen. However, it is also likely that such practices are underpinned by unconscious identifications with the maternal generation in her family (her aunts and her own mother) as well as with idealised, abstract versions of mothers that, for her, require the donning of new clothes. Nonetheless, she does not relinquish her embodied youthful style completely and 'does' young, fashionable style when she goes out with peers. She also continues her enthusiasm for performing youthful style through her daughter's clothes. Here we can see a multiplicity to identity and identifications.

The recognition of multiplicity in identifications implies conflict, since it raises questions of if and how a person achieves coherence or integration (Hollway, 2009). The idea of unconscious dynamic conflict as the psychic motor for action is common to all psychoanalytic theories and was used by Erikson (1959) to theorise identity transition through the life course, not as smooth, but accomplished through ordinary conflicts among the multiplicity of elements that jostle to make up an identity at a given time. These elements do not 'belong' to the self in any fixed way; rather the psychological boundaries of identity are seen as more or less porous, so that there is a continual interchange between internal and social worlds: 'We are constructed of dynamic, internalised relationships between self and object. In turn we externalise our inner worlds onto our outside relationships, which turn again to influence our inner organisation throughout our development as children and adults' (Scharff, 1992: xviii).

In this (object relations) perspective, 'objects' importantly include others and parts of others. The processes of introjection (which involves internalising other people's characteristics or words and making them a part of the self) and projection (in which thoughts and emotions – often the threatening or unwanted ones – are attributed to others) are fundamental forms of transaction between bodies and objects in their environments (Hinshelwood, 1995). We say bodies advisedly here, because these dynamics, not being accessible to conscious awareness, are experienced in sensual emotional ways. We use the concept of identification in this way, meaning not the conscious identifications that people claim (as when Silma tells the interviewer 'I've gone a bit more mature, more understanding, like a more motherly type'), but the unconscious

ways in which parts of others are taken into the self and parts of the self imaginatively put into others. For example, in the early days Silma says that breast feeding 'is (laughs) really nice, I'm like "oh my little one's having something from me" (hmm) I feel really nice, I don't know (laughs) about anybody, but I feel really nice when she has my breast milk'. She explains that breast feeding helps Abeedah to put on weight because 'she was like me, tiny'. Identifications with the baby can take any available form and Silma's attachment to being 'tiny' provides one such vehicle. Here the quality of tinyness is being extended from herself into Abeedah while she is also giving her something tangible of herself, namely her breast milk.

A further example illustrates Silma's new identification with her mother as she talks about her feelings straight after Abeedah's birth. She says 'to be a mother, it's a totally different feeling (mm), you know how your mother brought you up and gave birth to you, and the love between – the bond between the baby and the mother, it's a really special feeling'. Here, she seamlessly moves between her own new feelings of being a mother to her baby and a position as her mother's baby. It demonstrates how new mothers are simultaneously 'self-as-mother', 'self-as-child' and therefore, according to Gous (2005), 'mother-of-self-as-child'. Their identifications are multiply intersubjective in character because identification with their babies necessarily puts new mothers in pivotal positions in the middle of three generations since they have been babies of their own mothers (c.f. Mooney *et al.*, 2002). This access to simultaneous identifications with their mothers and with their babies affords a powerful transmission of maternal identity practices from one generation to the next in a way that does not have to be consciously learned to have effects (Faimberg, 2005).

Attention to unconscious intersubjective processes gives added dynamism and depth to the unconsciousness and automaticity inherent in Bourdieu's (1990) concept of habitus that is central to his notion of practice. For Bourdieu, *habitus* – variously described as principles, dispositions, schemes and embodied history – generates and organises practice (1990: 53). As Nirmal Puwar observes,

The world (described by Bourdieu as objective structures and social fields) lives in our habitus (incorporated structures), not as a simple imprint that determines us, but rather as something we activate through our practices, however unconscious and automatic this social action may be.

(2004: 110)

In Silma's account of a visit to her aunts with her younger sister, we can see something of the interplay between the social and the subjective elements of practice in the ways that generational difference is made salient by Silma. In this scene there is a conflict between new and old parts of Silma's identity as her identifications shift between her, her aunts and her younger sister. She explains that previously she would never stay around in the room listening to the aunts, but that now 'it's quite interesting how they talk'. Her new interest in her aunts is reciprocated. Her aunts now formally invite her, the new mother, to their homes rather than expecting her to drop in informally, as she had before her daughter was born and as her younger sister still does. Being recognised as a mother by others in her family is an important part of her mothering identity. In this situation, her young sister gives her 'dirty looks' and, according to Silma, says,

'Oh my God, you're talking like Mum... you're not my Mum. You used to be like this. You used to be worse than me' (laughs). But now... because I've changed, and I don't want my little sister to be in that state... she goes 'oh what about when you used to stay out late, did anyone hurt you?' And I was like, 'Yeah that was *me*' (laughs).

In the accusation 'you're talking like my Mum', Silma's sister recognises Silma's new identifications with her mother's generation. At the same time she acknowledges what Silma has rejected as part of this move, namely the part that 'used to be worse than me', staying out late. Silma, having wanted to be a mother for a long time, is likely to have fantasies of what mothers should be like, that come from her long experience of experiencing her mother and aunts 'doing motherhood'. These may well inform her new interest in her aunts. Given that these changes are recent, the fact that Silma evaluates her old self with an apparently surprised 'Yeah that was me', followed by a laugh, indicates how marked she perceives her identity change to be.

This is a good example of the joint action of practices, relational positioning and dynamic identifications in Silma's identity transition. She starts by noticing her different treatment by the women of her mother's generation. It is not just their new positioning of her (for instance, the formal invitations they now extend to her), but her own preferred practices that have changed: she likes to stay around with these aunts listening to 'how they talk', something she did not do before she had a baby. The contrast between her new identity as a mother and her old one is experienced through her relational positioning, here exemplified in

how she experiences her young teenage sister giving her dirty looks for seeking out the aunts' company and for 'talking like Mum'. Now Silma identifies as a mother rather than a daughter when she worries about her little sister doing what, until recently, she used to do. Silma recognises her inconsistency but puts it down to being 'because I've changed'.

Silma's changed preferences, for her aunts' company in her dress and her protectiveness of her sister, indicate that the transition to motherhood is consequential and significant in her life at this time. However, the insistent quality of her claims to motherhood may become more relaxed as she repeatedly experiences people taking her maternal identity for granted and it becomes embedded (and embodied). We should also recognise that her claims are produced in an interview setting that explicitly is framed as finding out about how she experiences new motherhood. Our interviews with Silma over a year show changes in her consumption of clothes and demonstrate the cultural syncretism and evolution of her dress style. We cannot predict whether Silma will continue to prefer to wear shalwar kameez in the future; whether she will dress differently when she is meeting up with friends in Pizza Hut or McDonald's, or what she will wear if she returns to employment. In other words, our thinking about the performativity of practice needs to accommodate situatedness, temporality and the intersectionality and multiplicity of identifications in time and space. The multiplicity of identities and contexts in which Silma is positioned (like all the mothers in our sample) produces ordinary, mundane conflicts that make changes to identity positions somewhat disjunctive.

Claiming a motherhood identity

Identity claims are likely to be enhanced by the public demonstration that rarer, higher status, mothering practices have been accomplished. The example below demonstrates how Silma was able to surprise her family (and herself) by claiming recognition for the performance of a valued cultural skill.

When Abeedah was six months old, the interviewer (Heather) asked Silma about ceremonies associated with Abeedah's birth (a question that we asked all the mothers). First, Silma described how her mother and mother-in-law gave Abeedah her first haircut: her hair was shaved off and weighed before being buried, and the equivalent weight of the hair, in money, was donated to charity. The interviewer is curious about the cultural origin and meaning of the tradition, but Silma is vague and

moves the conversation away from the search for cultural meaning, to a longer narrative about how she has since shaved Abeedah's hair twice. We join the interview at the interviewer's fourth attempt to identify the cultural significance of the practices in Silma's account:

Heather: And why is the hair buried then, what is the thinking behind that?

Silma: I (.) don't know the exact story behind it. (*Heather:* Hmm) Um, but all I know is ever since (inaudible) like every baby who is born we just (.)

Heather: It's just tradition?

Silma: Yeah, yeah and I've never come round to asking anyone why, what's the reason behind? It's just the once, the birth hair, that's it yeah.

Heather: And how have you –

Silma: I mean I love bathing her and then cutting her hair. (*Heather:* Do you?) I cut her hair two days ago by myself. (*Heather:* Uh huh.) And I bathed her, so that was a good experience. That's the second time I've cut her hair on my own. (*Heather:* Uh huh.) Yeah (laughs)

Heather: And tell me about how that was.

Silma: The first time I thought 'OK then, can I do it?' Nobody was home, they were all out shopping and I said 'OK then' And, um she'd been scratching her head for quite a few days, and I thought maybe it's because of feeling hot, or because her hair was irritating her. (*Heather:* Uh huh.) And I said 'OK then. I've got (an actual baby blade) so let me just try' (laughs) And I just put her on my lap, just wrapped a cloth . . . and I was talking to her and I just started shaving it off slowly. And then I got the bath ready and I bathed her. And everyone (laughs) came home and it was like 'Oh my god, did you?' And I said 'Yeah I managed quite well'. (*Heather:* Yeah.) Um, she wasn't fidgeting or anything, so that was quite good, yeah (laughs).

Heather: Yeah, and the bath-

Silma: My mum was surprised, my mum was like, 'you didn't? How did you do that?' I was like 'I just did it for myself'. I phoned her after I did it, I was like, 'Mum' I said 'guess what? I've just cut Abeedah's hair'. My mum was like. 'How? Did you make any scratches on her head?' I said 'No I didn't'. 'Did you cut her head?' I said 'No I didn't' (laughs).

This interview interaction and Silma's narratives of Abeedah's head shaves are 'intensely located' (Wetherell and Edley, 1998: 170), situated

in multiple and interrelated contexts. Silma shows herself and her family how she is becoming a mother through the activity of shaving Abeedah's hair (without scratches or cuts). This is suggested in the phrase 'I just did it for myself' where one might expect 'by myself' or 'for Abeedah'. At the discursive level, how Silma gives meaning to these practices, as well as how she resists other meanings, can be understood as a part of her ongoing identity work in becoming a mother.

This account was produced within an interview interaction, between two mothers of different ethnicities, ages and classes, as well as in a wider social environment where researchers have commented on a 'climate of fear and suspicion' amongst Muslim research participants towards the intentions of researchers, in a sustained period of state surveillance and heightened research interest following concerns about Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism (Sanghera and Thapar-Bjorkert, 2008: 552). In order to understand better the role of practice in identity change, we need to take account of how all these different contexts might frame Silma's interview narratives, while also investigating how the meaning of the practice of shaving Abeedah's hair is produced and 'moves' throughout the interview interaction. We can do some of this by examining areas of contestation in the above extract. It is notable how the interviewer's questions repeatedly interpellate or 'call' (Althusser, 1971) Silma to position herself in relation to cultural identifications. In resisting these calls, she demonstrates that there are other, familial and maternal, identifications at play. So while Silma closes down the conversation on cultural meaning, it is the interviewer, in the above exchange, who tries unsuccessfully to move the conversation on from hair cutting to bathing. The interviewer's own experience of motherhood is too removed from Silma's for her to grasp immediately the intricacies of negotiations over the distribution of care within an extended family or to put together memories of the fragile jerkiness of a new baby's head with Silma's evident pride in her accomplishment of the shaving. This is a revelatory moment in which Silma draws upon a narrative of transformation to showcase a temporary settlement of new identifications achieved in the practice of competently shaving Abeedah's head. Her identity work is produced through a narrative that organises time (Bakhtin, 1981; Ricoeur, 1984), and uses it to mark and display her identity transitions within a biographical chronology and context.

Silma's account here is full of the tensions experienced in her performance of a new identity. She expresses these tensions in different voices and positions that contest each other and clamour for attention

in the reported speech of her in-laws and of her mother's surprise at her competence. This dramatised moment of identity transition is achieved through talk about a practice redolent with cultural history and normalised in contemporary repetition. Silma also uses her narrative to enact and signify a move away from her previous biographical positioning as the 'weak one' in her family of origin to a stronger, more independent and adult positioning. (This change is supported by evidence elsewhere in Silma's interview data.)

Silma's shaving of her baby's head takes place on a rare day when she is alone in the house and so able to attempt a more autonomous version of motherhood than the one her family apparently expects from her, subverting their expectations and positioning of her. The space and impetus for trying out a new practice is also created by her mother's debilitating illness, which requires Silma to be 'strong' (and assume caring responsibilities for her mother), disrupts her expectations of what her own mother would do for Abeedah and so cuts short the apprenticeship in motherhood Silma had expected. It is not surprising then that Silma reports that she repeated the shaving of Abeedah's head, performatively making the practice part of her own repertoire of skills, and also that she insists on telling the interviewer of her success.

Conclusions

Silma's mothering practices derive from a range of social sources, including health practitioners and her own mother. However, they are also produced from unconscious processes of identification with both her mother and baby and from her desire to position herself within her imagined notions of what constitutes the motherhood identity in which she has long been invested. Silma works at becoming a mother by learning and repeating the practices necessary to mothering: those that are routinised and quotidian, such as feeding and bathing; those that are ritualised and culturally specific, such as shaving her baby's head and some (e.g., dress codes) that serve to mark her changed generational positioning. Such practices constitute the 'doing' of motherhood and involve a moving away from identifications with non-mothers and towards identifications with experienced mothers.

Silma's case illustrates the ordinary dynamic conflicts entailed in becoming a mother. These can be enacted and worked on through relationships with people. For example, Silma's claiming of new-found maturity involves ordinary conflict in that it is resisted and resented by her younger sister, but welcomed and encouraged by her mother and

aunts. At the same time, conflicts can be enacted in relation to objects. Our example here was how Silma seems to be trying out the renunciation of youthful dress styles, at least when she is at home. At the same time, she is able to retain and project these desires through the ways in which she dresses her daughter. We exemplified how such positioning and enactment works through unconscious as well as conscious identifications. These conflicts and contradictions provide an insight into the way that identities are continually in process as points of temporary attachment, rather than being fixed and completed (Hall, 1996). In so much as our analysis suggests the irregular, bumpy and unpredictable movements involved in the transition to new motherhood identities, it also suggests that new motherhood identities are not simply pre-given and activated, but are dynamically and creatively made and remade.

Note

1. Interviews were supplemented with detailed reflexive field notes (Elliott, 2007) and six participants were recruited to a year-long weekly psychoanalytically informed observation. A special issue of the journal 'Infant Observation', edited by Cathy Urwin who led the observation study, presents this side of the research and the six cases of becoming a mother that resulted (Urwin, 2007). An afterword compares the interview and observation methods (Hollway, 2007).

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