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The Sikh Gender Construction and Use of Agency in Spain: Negotiations and Identity (Re)Constructions in the Diaspora

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Abstract: For decades, Sikhs have made the choice to migrate to the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), or Canada, as these countries are held in high esteem by Sikh communities and appear to afford prestige in socio-cultural terms to those who settle in them. However, changes in border policies (among other considerations such as the greater difficulty of establishing themselves in other countries, the opening of borders by regularization processes in Spain, commercial business purposes, or political reasons) have compelled Sikh migrants to diversify their destinations, which now include many European countries, Spain among them. The first generation of Sikhs arrived in Spain as part of this search for new migratory routes, and there are now sizable Sikh communities settled in different parts of this country. All migrants need to follow a process of adaptation to their new living environment. Moreover, a novel living context may offer new possibilities for migrants to (re)negotiate old identities and create new ones, both at individual and collective levels. This article will explore a case study of a Sikh community in Barcelona to reflect on the forms in which Sikh men and women perceive, question, and manage their identity and their lives in this new migratory context in Spain. The present paper argues that adaptation to the new place implies identity negotiations that include the redefinition of gender roles, changes in the management of body and appearance, and, most particularly, the emergence of new forms of agency among young Sikh women. In addition, we argue that new forms of female agency are made possible not only by the opportunities offered by the new context, but also emerge as a reaction against the many pressures experienced by the young women and exerted by their male counterparts in Sikh communities, as the latter push against the loss of traditional values.

Keywords: Sikhs in Barcelona; identity (re)construction; gender relations; agency

1. Introduction

This article explores the diverse dynamics and negotiations carried out within the Sikh community in Barcelona as part of migrants' processes of integration to their new context. The Sikh communities which have settled in diverse European countries face a variety of separate challenges, as their relationship to the host society and the conditions for their integration are quite dissimilar, depending not only on national regulations but also on political, economic, social and cultural environments. Moreover, national contexts intersect and combine with transnational dimensions, especially in the case of the European Union, thus generating a complex range of possibilities that make it impossible to generalize about the practices and forms of integration of different Sikh communities around Europe¹.

¹ Jacobsen and Myrvold (2011, 2012).

In order to provide some context for the particular case study examined in this article, it is an important point out that Sikhs have only recently started migrating to Spain. Changes in border policies, the greater difficulty of establishing themselves in other countries, the opening of borders by regularization processes in Spain, commercial business purposes, or political reasons among other considerations have compelled Sikh to come to Spain². According to my informants in Barcelona, the first Sikhs arrived in this city in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The current size of the Sikh community in Barcelona is difficult to ascertain as Spanish Government census data does not establish categorical differences between people in terms of their religion. However, in 2007, the Sikh Council of Catalonia and other institutions made an estimate of the number of Sikhs settled in Spain, taking into account both legal (“regular”) and illegal (“irregular” or “without papers”) migrants, and came to the conclusion that, at that time, there were around 5000 Sikhs living in Catalonia and around 10,000 in all of Spain. In addition, the number of *gurdwaras* (Sikh places of worship and assembly) has increased significantly in recent years. The fieldwork carried out for this research reveals that there are currently at least 22 *gurdwaras* spread throughout Spanish territory, most of them in Catalonia; there are 6 *gurdwaras* in and around Barcelona.

As can be observed in the case of Barcelona, the dynamics of integration of Sikhs to their new situation and to a new geographic, political, social, and cultural environment vary according to gender and age. This has led to tensions among community members. However, they have also promoted the emergence of new forms of agency, particularly among young Sikh women. The aim of this work is to reflect on the processes of gender construction and reconstruction among Sikhs in a new migratory context. This paper unveils the tensions and responses which result from the pressures exerted by a strong patriarchal system on a new generation of Sikh women in Spain, who, in turn, use their newly (re)created agency as a response to these pressures and as an exit strategy from them. In addition, we also show the ways in which Sikh men negotiate their own integration through their bodies, in order to navigate their migratory project in a successful manner. We describe and analyze the gender (re)configurations that occur in the process of migratory adaptation, as well as the motivations and consequences that accompany such gender negotiations, as well as the transformations and uses of new forms of agency. In fact, the changes that take place within the dynamics of migratory adaptation and integration are closely linked to, or at least can be analyzed from, the perspective of body management and appearance, which represents a significant part of Sikh identity. We also reflect on those situations where the negotiation of corporeal (re)presentations through individual agency subverts the constraints imposed on culturally mediated bodies. We place some emphasis on negotiations and changes, but we also find continuities in processes that link individuals to their places of origin.

In this article, we explore the concepts of body and corporeal management and appearance and the debates that surround them, as well as their relationship with processes of identity construction³, given that identity can be conceptualized as fluid⁴ and thus is always under (re)construction. Bodies and corporeal (re)presentations are influenced and constrained by culture. However, at the same time, bodies and forms of corporality make culture. Both concepts offer useful prisms through which a society can be analyzed and understood. We also include notions and considerations around the migratory and

² According to my informants. Spain is not usually the first choice of destination for Sikhs who ended up migrating to this country. They came here mostly due to barriers they encountered when trying to move first to their preferred destinations (USA, UK and Canada) and then to more popular western European countries. As it is common in processes of chain migration, a small number of Sikhs arrived in Spain as tourists, secured themselves in terms of jobs and accommodation, and then called upon relatives and other co-nationals to join them, thus becoming a pull factor for other members of their community in India. In general, Sikhs migrate due to work and other economic reasons, although they might also move in search of the prestige afforded by countries of the Global North, or to escape political or religious intolerance in their country of origin. For literature on border policies and migratory movements in Spain see, for instance, [Alonso et al. \(2015\)](#) or [Recaño and Domingo \(2005\)](#).

³ [Barth \(1976\)](#); [Baumann \(2001, \[1996\] 2003\)](#); [Gupta and Ferguson \(1992\)](#).

⁴ [Bauman \(1999\)](#).

diaspora phenomena⁵, which represent fundamental milestones and experiences in the lives of those included in the case study. Gender, defined as a social construction that establishes the roles of men and women in any given society, is also a vertebral concept in this work. A gendered perspective⁶ is essential since gender structures the relationships—as well as the processes of identification, difference, and power relations—between men and women within and outside the community of study. Finally we must consider agency⁷—the capacity of individuals to subvert the limitations or constrictions imposed by culture and religion; the notion of agency enables us to discuss how individuals actively take sides (or not) when confronted with the conditions, limitations or potentialities that surround their lives at social, political, economic, and religious levels.

As analyses of the body and sexuality from a gender perspective have shown, ideological representations shape and condition human bodies in a very significant way⁸. In this sense, it could be said that religion is the ideal ideological arena from which prescriptions and models regarding proper, acceptable bodies are issued; such prescriptions also have a bearing on the individuals who possess the malleable⁹ bodies. Our point of departure is twofold: on the one hand, bodies are political since forms of control over individuals within groups or religious communities are established through their bodies¹⁰; on the other hand, individual bodies are the sites through which individuals, as agents, manage (through their corporeal expressions and representations) to develop themselves in tune with the context and achieve their goals or desires. The main aim of this text is to explore and analyze the changes that take place among individuals and the questions that assail them as a result of their efforts to adapt to and integrate into a new society. We argue that body management and (re)presentation, and especially the changes related to both of them, are unavoidable elements for the analysis of general social transformations. Our perspective involves using body and corporeal management (as a result of embodiment) as key concepts in the analysis of changes that occur at the level of the body but affect wider areas of people's lives, such as economic, political, or social realities. We are particularly interested in those changes that individuals assume to be not only necessary for their integration into the host society but also advantageous as strategies for adaptation, which are enacted through their own sense of agency. These changes could also entail the rethinking of conceptualizations of gender in relation to the culture of origin, and such rethinking and reconceptualizing might become embodied in turn. In this sense, we contend that the analysis of women's experiences can be particularly productive in order to ascertain whether the new situations they face bring about a process of self-reflexivity, both as members of society and in terms of the gender roles they play.

Finally, we describe and explain the processes of cultural socialization and the modes of embodiment through which they occur, considering political, economic, or work spheres as gender substructures which become incorporated by individuals in their process of adaptation to their host society, mainly to be accepted within it. We examine and delineate the emergence of new values and bodily practices, which are different from those held and enacted at the place of origin (the Punjab) but which become performed at the place of arrival (Barcelona). Taking into account this premise, the concept of *emergence*, as described by Raymond Williams¹¹, is fundamental. We utilize Williams' notion of emergence since this concept encompasses both new meanings and values, new ethics, new relationships, and types of relationships that are created continuously, as well as those that are alternative or oppositional¹².

⁵ Brown (2006); Gavron (2005); Sayad (2006); Vertovec (2009).

⁶ Butler ([1993] 2002, [1990] 2007); Mathieu (1991, 2002); Stolcke (1996, 2003).

⁷ Esteban (2004); Erickson and Murphy (2008); Lyon and Barbalet (1994); Salzman (2001).

⁸ (Martínez Guirao and Infantes 2010, p. 10).

⁹ Bodies are malleable since they are adaptable, they can be changed or modified depending on the circumstances and decisions of their owners.

¹⁰ Foucault (1976, [1976] 2006).

¹¹ (Williams 1997, p. 145).

¹² In del Valle (2002, p. 31).

In the first part of this article, we discuss how gender construction works and how gendered practices are carried out in the constitution of Sikh subjects in Barcelona. Later on, we deal with the forms in which the negotiation of male bodies is produced in order to adapt to the new migratory context and how this negotiation varies depending on the processes of integration and the precise socio-historical context when these processes occur. Finally, we explore the use of agency among young Sikh women migrants, an agency that is enabled by the opportunity to become relatively invisible in the new context and is also related to the possibilities afforded by the use of new technologies.

Since Sikhs in Spain are a relatively new ethnic and religious migrant group, they are not identified by the local population as a distinct community and they tend to be confused with other Asian groups such as Pakistanis or generalized simply as “Indians”. Being a recently arrived migrant group, they are still shaping their identity as a community in this new geopolitical and cultural setting and are still working on how they want to present themselves to the host society. This process of (re)construction as a community interpellates and questions issues of gender and identity as well.

2. A Brief Methodological Note

This article is based on data gathered through ethnographic fieldwork and subsequently analyzed to form the basis of my doctoral thesis. I used multi-sited ethnography (the practice of pursuing ethnographic fieldwork in more than one geographical location) as research methodology, and carried out in depth, continuous fieldwork for 18 months¹³ in diverse and distant locations: Barcelona, London, Delhi, and Punjab.

The present work relies fundamentally on qualitative techniques for data gathering, whilst quantitative data has been used to obtain only a certain kind of information, such as Sikh migrants' places of origin and settlement. As has been mentioned before, Spanish census data does not contain information on the religious affiliation of people, so it does not offer sufficient information to differentiate Sikh migrant groups from other groups from the same geographical region. Additional bibliographic and archival research was carried out in London and Delhi.

As I alternated between field locations, living side by side with Sikh communities in Barcelona and accompanying individuals and groups in their sojourns to India, I developed deep links and widened my contacts with people within this transnational community, which was crucial for the purpose of comparing practices and values in the different locations. This is why a multi-sited ethnography, as defined by Marcus¹⁴ (“follow the people”, “follow the thing”) became paramount from the beginning of my research and gave shape to my methodological design. This type of ethnographic investigation allowed me to gain a profound knowledge of Sikh communities and of Sikhism, and to compare and contrast their ways of life in the different geographical settings.

I have used a variety of qualitative and mixed-methods techniques for this research, which include direct and participant observation, semi-structured and open interviews, and video recordings. Although formal interviews felt quite threatening to informants, informal conversations facilitated a better understanding of their statements, perceptions, and reflexions about their own practices. I have also conducted internet searches to obtain information from news outlets, individual and community webpages, and social networks, although those materials have been differentiated from proper academic sources for analytical purposes.

3. The Construction of Gender

Socially and culturally constructed meanings based on sexual differences are created and re-created within the arena of gender relations. It is thus necessary to first explore the social places and spaces

¹³ The main research took place between 2006 and 2010. After the main body of fieldwork was completed, I kept in touch with informants and carried out additional research activities up until 2017.

¹⁴ Marcus (1998).

that men and women occupy in Sikh society, as well as their gendered roles and hierarchies. As Punjabi society is a traditional and highly patriarchal society¹⁵, it is generally accepted that men have preferential access to the majority of the social, cultural, political, and economic assets and resources, as well as making most relevant decisions in domestic and public settings. Men also hold the bulk of the property and inheritance rights, while women remain in a position of subalternity. Furthermore, in addition to the ideology that helps to build gender relations in Sikh society, we must take into account social and cultural discourses in relation to gender. Despite the impression of the existence of a strong gender ideology within the Sikh community, Nikki-Guninder Kaur Singh argues, in her book entitled *The feminine principle in the Sikh vision of the transcendent* that Sikh gender construction processes and practices are full of contradictions. Speaking of Sikh women, this author states that “the characterization of girls and women in my society was a source of constant ambivalence”¹⁶. Kaur Singh portrays an extremely patriarchal society in which, on the one hand, a woman can become Prime Minister, while, on the other hand, many other women are killed with full impunity due to dowry issues¹⁷ or are mistreated and rejected because their perceived inability to produce offspring¹⁸. Thus the constitution of the female gender intersects with cultural notions of class, sexuality, and reproductive capacities, and accordingly, there exist different kinds of womanhood, which are attributed different values.

It is said that Sikh ideology considers that women occupy a prominent place in Sikh society, as they are invested with positive values and are also deemed fundamental for the creation of the world and persons. Most literature focusing on Sikhs¹⁹ maintains that men and women are equally positioned to attain progress in spiritual practice and emancipation²⁰. In fact, it is believed that the female dimension is essential to interconnect all human beings, undoing social, creed, racial, or gender hierarchies²¹. Kaur Singh goes as far as to say that the literature of Sikhism is in harmony with western feminists’ voices since there is a centrality of female symbols and imagery in Sikh literature, both sacred and secular. As the author states, female models are presented frequently either in prose or in verse, portraying the physical and mental strength of women, their spiritual awakening, their existential Angst [sic], ethical values, and mystical union, thus providing a picture of a multivalent and complex feminine imagery²². Finally, the author states that “feminine phenomena, feminine tone, feminine terminology, feminine imagery, and feminine consciousness form the heart and muscle of it. (. . .) She is the subject”²³. On a more concrete level, this vindication of the feminine and of the substantial role that women play is also highlighted in sacred texts where Sikh gurus vehemently criticize practices and customs of their time that were degrading towards women, such as wife purchasing, dowries²⁴, seclusion, the veil, the custom of *suttee* (or self-immolation of the widows on the funeral pyre of the husband), or feminine infanticide. Some of these practices are still being carried out today²⁵.

At the present time, this idealization of women and of the feminine, which in many cases is maintained in dominant narratives is far from the social reality among Sikh men and women. A strong form of patriarchy dominates institutions²⁶, access to resources, and the relationship between men and

¹⁵ Jakobsh (2006, 2014, 2017).

¹⁶ (Kaur Singh 1993, p. 1).

¹⁷ Op. cit. See also Kumar and Tripathi (2004).

¹⁸ Syamala (2012); Stellar et al. (2016).

¹⁹ Kaur Singh (1993); Pániker (2007); Matringe (2008).

²⁰ (Pániker 2007, p. 300).

²¹ (Kaur Singh 1993, p. 244).

²² Op. cit., p. 3.

²³ Ibid., p. 251.

²⁴ Dowry, which is necessary to marry a daughter or sister, together with hypergamy as a marital ideal for women, constitute barriers to female emancipation because they relate directly to a form of prestige hinged upon family honour where men are the guarantors. Garha (2020) notes that changes in dowry patterns are taking place in this regard.

²⁵ (Pániker 2007, p. 300).

²⁶ To know how this system of patriarchal values was established and consolidated through time and historical processes, see the conscientious and interesting work of Jakobsh (2003).

women. It is characterized by a clear inequality and where men, de facto, dominate²⁷. Despite the traditional narrative of gender egalitarianism that is understood to be inherent within Sikh sacred texts, Sikh history is largely told from the perspective of men. All the gurus were male, Sikh institutions are completely dominated by men, and rituals such as the initiation to the *khālsā* were exclusively designated for male candidates until a few decades ago²⁸. At present, there is a significant inequality in power relations, which means that women find it difficult to access different areas of power or find significant barriers to develop their agency. The reality reveals a substantial inequality between genders and severe difficulties for women to achieve different degrees of empowerment, in a social world full of obstacles for women, the first of which is the deliberate management and limitation of the number of female individuals born into the community²⁹.

In everyday life, the position of women is clearly defined, first and foremost through their main role as mothers of and carers for sons and daughters, confined to the domestic sphere. Their social condition as private domain caregivers is reinforced, on the one hand, by a de facto rejection of divorce and the absence of property rights ascribed to women, and, on the other hand, by the crucial concept of honor, *izzat*, which translates into a rigid notion of chastity linked to modesty and decorum in conduct and appearance, as well as a rigorous taboo placed on adultery³⁰.

4. Gendered Practices in the Construction of Sikh Subjects in Barcelona

In the construction of new Sikh subjects in Barcelona, many traditional practices are maintained, if not enhanced, in order to avoid the introduction of “novel” or “extraneous” western practices, which are considered detrimental to Sikh identity. Men, particularly firstborns, continue to play a fundamental role within the family structure. Similar to the rest of Indian society³¹ and even though new legislation allocates daughters equal coparcenary birthrights in joint family property, substantial gender bias persists. As Navtej Purewal—following Delphy³²—notes in her work “Sex-selective abortion, neoliberal patriarchy and structural violence in India”,

Within the symbolic realm of economic entitlements and norms of transmission of capital through inheritance, sons receive land and/or property within norms of inheritance, while daughters are given gifts or dowries that require them to marry and exist non-autonomously,

²⁷ (Matringe 2008, p. 261).

²⁸ While Pániker (2007, p. 301) may have made this point, it was first made by Jakobsh (2003).

²⁹ According to Punjab government data from the 2011 census, there is a ratio of 893 women per 1000 men. It is interesting to consider the sexual ratio here given the structural deficit of women in India in general and especially in Punjab. This can be related to an entrenched patriarchal structure and a negative perception of the intrinsic and societal value of women, which might have been at the origin of practices such as infanticide and female feticide, widely silenced but traditionally accepted. The existence of these practices and their consequences have concerned successive Indian governments and have resulted in official publications such as the Handbook on Pre-Conception & Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994 and Rules with Amendments (Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of India 2006). Their persistence and significance also become evident in the works of renowned author Sen (1990) or in a paper presented at the Population Association of America Meeting in 2009, where the various authors (Pande et al. 2009) discuss the numbers of women that have “disappeared” due to the socio-cultural preference of men over women in countries such as India or China. In the article on infanticide and female feticide, Campos Mansilla (2010) points out how these practices are causing a deficit of around 48 million women in India, although this deficit is not so high in urban areas, especially among the middle classes and families where women have higher education. Both Sen and Campos Mantilla refer to an area known in India as “the feticide belt”, across the states of Haryana and the Punjab, where the greatest imbalances between men and women are being registered. As Punjab is a relatively prosperous agricultural zone, female feticide and infanticide practices cannot be attributed directly to poverty in but may be better explained in terms of the preference for sons in families with landholdings due to strict inheritance customs. In fact, the work of Purewal (2018) stresses that sex selective abortion across the whole of India is structurally produced and has to be understood as an outcome of broader systemic economic, political and social processes. Regarding the specific case of the Punjab, Kaur Singh states that “female fetuses are being aborted to preserve the legacy, business, property, and status of fathers and their sons” (Kaur Singh 2008, p. 123).

³⁰ (Singh and Tatla 2006, p. 30).

³¹ See Deininger et al. (2013).

³² Delphy (1988).

thus entrenching them within the patriarchal structures of not only their natal family but also their marital family³³.

While men inherit a large part of the family's possessions equally among them, ensuring continuity of the lineage, only those daughters who, despite their legal entitlement, make no demands on parents for their part of the inheritance are considered "good daughters". These women, daughters and sisters, understand very clearly the threat of being stigmatized as "selfish" or of being ostracised by their families³⁴ and they continue to renounce their inheritance rights even when they have already been living in Barcelona, the new migratory context.

Likewise, men enjoy greater freedoms than their sisters in Barcelona from a very young age, and their acts and opinions are given much more respect. They are allowed to arrive home late, to go out on weekends and enjoy certain freedoms unthinkable for women, such as going to the cinema with a group of friends or, for instance, giving private Hindi or Punjabi lessons to people of the opposite sex. However, the relationship and contact of young men with the local population is also tightly controlled, since western influence is considered to exert a negative influence on them, particularly around those activities which involve interactions between young men and women.

Regarding marriage, young men are inclined to select Sikh brides from India, unlike their female counterparts, who prefer to marry Sikh men already living in Spain. For the men, marriage with a woman of Indian origin who has already settled in Spain would be a much cheaper affair, yet they prefer to bring a bride from their country of origin, one who has not migrated, as they assume that she will fulfill her role of wife, housewife, and family caretaker better. Conversely, young Sikh women in Barcelona prefer to marry an Indian counterpart already settled in Spain or in other European countries as they assume that Indian men who have grown up in Europe will be more inclined to support a spouse working outside of the home while having a family and yet leading a life independently from extended family. In any case, and as it is the case in continental India, the prestige of both families involved in a marriage, the husband's and the bride's, rest upon the shoulders of the bride alone, and thus the woman's attitudes and actions are constrained and controlled by both families and by the community at large. To a large extent, the value of a man hinges upon his wife. How she behaves, dresses, and attends to guests, has a bearing on his honourability. Daughters learn in their birth families which qualities are considered worthy of a good woman, a good wife, and a good daughter-in-law. As a male informant (a husband and a father) once told me,

A woman must be attentive to everything her husband requires, to prepare special food for him if he requires it, be attentive to his clothes, his shoes, in short, to everything that he needs. If the husband says something to her, that's fine; But if he says no, it's no. And there's not much more to say about this. (Field notes, Barcelona, 28 August 2007)

In short, the ideal woman has to devote herself completely to her husband and attend to all his needs; she must obey him without questioning and she must live primarily for him and his family. This includes taking care of his parents too. Sometimes, the conditions in which women do so might be considered as servitude. However, women also enjoy their spaces and moments of meeting and relaxation with female neighbors and friends. In these contexts, they rest, relax, chat and share concerns, confidences, gossip, and fun. The minute there are guests in the home, women retreat into a decorous and solicitous position, attending to the husband and the guests, never sitting down to eat with them, bringing food and drink, and cleaning up after them. Men may or may not eat with the guests, but they do sit down to chat with them in a relaxed way. Men never collaborate in the preparation and serving of the food and drink: their role is exclusively that of hosts.

³³ (Purewal 2018, p. 26).

³⁴ Purewal, *ibid.*, p. 29.

In the development of women as social beings, there is also a turning point that occurs in adolescence, which becomes visible at that time when young women are required to wear the *shalwar kameez* to the exclusion of other types of garments. This happens regularly in rural Punjab, but we can also observe similar cases in Barcelona. As Senah³⁵, a young unmarried woman in her early twenties, explained to me:

I like to wear jeans and T-shirts, but at the age of 15, my father told me and my sisters that we had to wear only suits (*shalwar kameez*), because of the men. (Informal interview, Punjab, 9 September 2007)

In Barcelona, Neja, a 22-year-old woman, reflected in conversation about the restrictions imposed on women's dressing styles. As I wrote in my field diary:

Neja speaks of the clothes here and the freedom here as "modern". She makes constant reference to this idea, establishing a link between what is from here and "the modern", saying that Indians should be "more modern". (Fieldnotes, Barcelona, 4 June 2008)

The use of certain clothes has different meanings depending on the context and is related to the construction of both individual and group identity. Particular clothes can be utilized to conceal the shape of those parts of the body, both feminine and masculine, which serve to differentiate males and females and are also used as symbols for the construction of social sex³⁶ and gender relations³⁷. In this way, the *shalwar kameez* for women and the *kurta pyjama* for men avoid the perception of bodily shapes, which are considered "dangerous" because of their erotic or sexual content. The *suit* or *shalwar-kameez* consists of long pants and a wide, baggy camisole that reaches almost to the knees. It is complemented by the *chunni* or *dupata*, a scarf that is placed on the chest, preventing the observation or insinuation of the female shape. Moreover, the *chunni* or *dupata*, in addition to concealing the area of the female chest, serves to cover the head in the temples and other spaces that become sacred by the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. It also signals the status of married women, who must place it over their heads in public spaces or moments to mark their marital condition. Regarding the *kurta pyjama*³⁸, it is so wide in the upper part of the pants that it prevents any insinuation of male sexual organs.

In Barcelona, the *shalwar kameez* is generally used as an everyday garment by adult women who come from India, while their daughters prefer the daily use of "western" clothes. When in Barcelona, the women who were largely socialized in Punjab, particularly in rural areas, use the *shalwar kameez* as a daily garment. Teenagers and young adult women, or those who spend a great deal of their time outside the private space because of public-facing work, or who attend secondary schools or higher education, generally wear "western" clothing. There are, however, some garments that are strictly prohibited at all times: miniskirts, skirts, or pants that expose the legs, shirts, and dresses with a low neckline and straps, or clothing that is sleeveless. In the case of dresses, if they are not low cut, they can be worn with long pants.

On Sundays, the day of attendance at the *gurdwara* and other community celebrations, women are required to wear the *shalwar kameez*, as it is considered indispensable for such events. In addition, the use of *shalwar kameez* implies belonging to a generational group—that of adult women—which has certain implications with respect to the social role played within the group. Thus, girls are exempted from the compulsory use of the *shalwar kameez* at the temple until they reach adolescence. Until that time, they can still choose to alternate the traditional garments with "western" clothes. However, after they have become adolescents, the *shalwar kameez* becomes compulsory for young women in sacred

³⁵ Pseudonyms are used throughout the article to favor the anonymity of informants.

³⁶ "Social sex" refers here to the cultural classification of biological sexual traits and their subsequent categorisation into masculine and feminine. "Gender" refers here to the social and cultural construction of sexual identity. See Mathieu (1991, 2002).

³⁷ Butler ([1993] 2002, [1990] 2007); Stolcke (1996, 2003).

³⁸ It is the traditional clothing for men in Punjab and it too consists of a long camisole and wide pants.

places in Barcelona. In rural Punjab, the *shalwar kameez* is obligatory on a daily basis since women of that age are already considered full social subjects within the group and are deemed to play a crucial role, as bearers of the family honor and as future links with other families within the community. At this stage, there are certain norms and duties with which these young women as gendered social beings must necessarily comply, namely, those duties and responsibilities attributed to them as sexualized subjects, and as the recipients of social impositions and cultural norms.

In this way, we argue that bodily appearance, as well as clothes, are crucial to the practices and management of the Sikh body and its corporality, and also to the construction of the physical identity and presentation of the Sikhs. These issues can be tied directly to the restraint of individuals through the control of their bodies. Similar to the prohibition for males to cut their hair (essential for *amritdharis* in order to become ideal Sikhs), clothes contribute to identity construction as well as the identification of individuals in the community. They can also point to a differentiation from the *other*. In the case of women, a feminine appearance through the use of certain clothes also serves to establish distinctions between generations, which are fundamental for the construction of identity either at an individual or collective level.

Norbert Elias, in his book *The civilizing process (El proceso de la civilización* in the Spanish translation used here)³⁹, discusses parents' preoccupations with their children's role in preserving the family's prestige. The author shows how parents are permanently concerned about the ways in which their sons and daughters will succeed (or not) in assimilating the behavioral patterns of their own class (or of a superior class) and worry about whether their children will be able to maintain or even increase the family's prestige. This includes parents' concern whether they will be able to protect their children from any exclusion from their own social group. These types of parental fears are crucial in the structuring and enactment of controls and impositions that families impose on individuals from a very early age⁴⁰. Although Elias' theories emanate from his investigation of class in western societies, his conclusions are useful in illuminating the case of parental fears and expectations and social limitations and constraints imposed on Sikh youth as they grow up to become full members of their group. In the case of Sikhs, strict regulations and control are applied to the ways in which people, and particularly women, dress, thus exerting direct control over their bodies, a control that is in turn closely related to the management of the family's prestige and honor and, by extension, to the honor of the community.

Despite a long history of migration among Punjabis, the context of diaspora has brought about a permanent sense of threat and a fear of loss of community and its values. It is because of this sense of threat and fear of loss that families, and, more generally, the men in the community, try to exert pressure on young women to wear the *shalwar kameez* as a daily dress, arguing that this is necessary for the preservation of values and traditions⁴¹. This was brought to the fore in a conversation with Neja:

Neja has also pointed out how her father does not insist too much on what she can or cannot wear, but Mandar (her little brother) reminds Neja that she is Indian (sic) and should not forget this. And that she should dress more with Indian clothes. Neja also says that they have a male cousin in Lanzarote [a Spanish island] who tells her and Mandar that Neja should wear Indian clothes. But Neja says not to pay much attention to her cousin, since he is neither her father, nor her brother. (Fieldnotes, Barcelona, 4 June 2008)

³⁹ (Elias [1977] 1993).

⁴⁰ Op. Cit., p. 529.

⁴¹ Traditionally, Sikh women, as has been the case with other Indian women, have played the role of preservers and transmitters of cultural traditions, and they have done so in part through the use of traditional clothing. As Tarlo (1996, pp. 320–22) points out, in India, in different times and contexts, women have been persuaded and encouraged to use local forms of clothing, and have even been praised for their loyalty to traditional attire and for being the guardians of local dressing traditions in the face of the push from western fashion. In the mid-twentieth century, for example, many Indian men switched to western-style clothes, while women kept their traditional dresses for two main reasons: first, out of convictions regarding feminine modesty, and second, because Indian men endeavoured to “protect” their women from the pollutant influence of the West (quotes are mine).

Thus, from an emic point of view, the feminine appearance is key for the upkeep, preservation, and representation of Sikh traditions and culture, and such maintenance and representation is done through women's bodies to a large extent. Nevertheless, it is necessary to explain that in different areas of India, the *shalwar kameez* involves various uses and connotations depending on the geographical and local context. For instance, young women in Delhi use *saris*, *kurtas* with jeans, or "western" clothes more often, whilst in rural Punjab, the use of *shalwar kameez* is dominant.

There are places where the *shalwar kameez* is worn only by Muslim women, or where it is used as a school uniform, or that young Indian women may also use it as an expression of emancipation and a progressive attitude. Moreover, in its current status as a fashionable form of dress⁴², we can consider the *shalwar kameez* as a polysemantic garment, which holds changing meanings depending on the context. It is, in this sense, very suggestive that Sikhs in Barcelona, both men and women, consider that the use of their traditional clothes and their traditional Sikh appearance constitutes a barrier for finding employment. Sikhs have to manage and negotiate their traditional appearance in different ways and depending on the stage of their process of integration. At first, when they arrive Spain, Sikhs, particularly the men, will avoid being seen as different. Yet after some time in the new country, and when they find themselves more or less established, they return to their traditional garments and bodily appearance. Regardless of the changes and movements which are permitted with regard to male attire, Sikh men generally insist that their women wear traditional garments and clothes.

The construction of a Punjabi adult woman as a Sikh subject implies, therefore, a series of guidelines to be followed that are prompted by community members, and especially by men, which is not surprising in a strongly patriarchal community. However, and in tune with the findings of Arthur Wesley Helweg in *Sikhs in England*⁴³, we find many cases in which it is the adult women themselves who put more pressure on their daughters and the rest of the family in order to avoid any kind of "deviant" behavior. According to Helweg,

The émigré wife was most affected if *izzat* was diminished. If she did not prove to be an upright wife and mother, improving the position of her husband's family, then shame would be brought on her, her parents, and kin group, as well as on her husband's family. Since women had this dual responsibility, it was they who reinstated social control. They exerted pressure in two ways: they influenced the behaviour of their family in England, and they reinstated a full network communication with Jandiali. (. . .) The women in Gravesend pressured their husbands against dealing with men who manifested deviant behavior⁴⁴.

Our research would suggest that in those cases when a family drastically rejects a young woman's relationship with a man of a higher caste, it tends to be the mother who most firmly rejects this situation, and who exerts most pressure on her daughter to terminate her love relationship. The young woman's mother's family in Punjab is also often strongly opposed to this kind of relationship, as it will be trying to preserve the honor of the young woman's mother and that of their granddaughter and niece, and by extension, of the entire family. It is not surprising that in a strongly patriarchal society, the men try to exercise control over the women. It is also not surprising that women incorporate and embody these guidelines, which they in turn pass to a younger generation of daughters, nieces, and granddaughters. This is especially salient in the new migratory context where, as mentioned above, there is a perceived threat to the loss of group identity. In Elias' terms, females are a "permanent concern"⁴⁵, and both men, in their roles as paternal authorities, and adult women reproduce these internalized and embodied social patterns.

⁴² See Tarlo (1996).

⁴³ Helweg (1986).

⁴⁴ Op. Cit., p. 59.

⁴⁵ Op. Cit.

However, men and women are constructed differently as Sikh subjects. Although there are common practices regarding the two genders, the motivations that generate these practices are substantially different. We find a clear example of this in the case of higher education. Both in Barcelona and in Punjab, men who have the capacity and opportunity are trained, obtain higher education qualifications and degrees, and will try to practice their profession in the future. Yet in the case of women, there seems to be a pattern whereby they are also trained and acquire qualifications and a profession, but they will cease their professional activity when they get married. One of the reasons why women are given access to educational and professional training is because this represents an investment in *social capital*⁴⁶. In other words, education and qualifications allow women to have access to better marriage prospects and, by marrying well, they generate greater prestige and strategic alliances for their families. This became evident in the case of Surdin, an adult male informant, who was looking for a husband for a young woman and he rejected a prospective partner due to his inferior level of qualification. Surdin argued that the woman was more educated than this prospective groom and he was therefore not “appropriate”, nor did his family have good status as a result⁴⁷.

The construction of the difference between men and women becomes particularly evident in sacred spaces, which also serve to reify and justify this differentiation. In the *gurdwaras* I visited in Delhi and the Punjab, Sikhs go to the temple with their families and as they sit together, it is possible to observe the differentiation in the practice of *seva*. In Southall, London, in the Sri Guru Singh Sabha Gurdwara, where there is a large Sikh community that was established a long time ago, we find a strict gendered distinction of places for men and women: there are separate bathrooms and areas to leave outerwear and shoes. There are also different worship spaces for men and women as well as different stairs to ascend separately, according to their gender. However, in the *gurdwaras* of Barcelona, all spaces are shared by men and women with the exception of the places reserved for standing and sitting in the temple. Men will sit on the left and women on the right (or vice versa). In the *gurdwaras* I visited in Punjab and Delhi, groups and families who go together to the temple sit together. Furthermore, in the Sikh temples in Barcelona, women cannot do *seva*, whereas they are allowed to do so in *gurdwaras* in Punjab and Delhi. However, the distribution of work will still be done according to gender: men cook and clean, and women are in charge of the preparation of the *chapati*.

In the same way, the entrances to *gurdwaras* are replete with symbolic connotations that highlight the differences between men and women. In Barcelona, for instance, the gates to the *gurdwaras*, especially on days when there is a religious service, are occupied by large numbers of men who gather there to chat, wait, or observe others. Women are hardly ever seen there. This differentiation of roles and use of space can also be observed when the streets are turned into temporary *gurdwaras* during festivals or processions. In the Nagar Kirtan in Barcelona, which took place on 4 November 2006, men were in charge of distributing the food, drink, as well as throwing rose petals and purifying the space with water. Women, however, did not perform this form of *seva*. In addition, men and women walked separately and physical distance was upheld through the use of a long stick that was held by two men on opposite ends. Women walked together behind this barrier, while men walked at the front of the procession. Only those men who were videotaping or taking photographs were permitted to cross the barrier temporarily.

Through processions of this kind, the street becomes a sacred space from the moment the Guru Granth Sahib (the most important religious scripture in Sikhism) is paraded through the street. In order for the secular, public space to be transformed into sacred space, it is necessary to purify it first through the appropriate rituals. Only then can the sacred scripture of the Sikhs be displayed. The street is ritually cleansed with water, the assistants walk barefoot and with their heads covered, and

⁴⁶ (Bourdieu [1979] 2000).

⁴⁷ Since Spanish census data does not classify people in terms of religion, it is not possible to know how many Sikh men and women attend secondary school or university, but during my fieldwork, most of the young women with whom I worked were students or combined work and study, whereas the young men were less engaged in educational trajectories.

the *Panj Pyare* (beloved five) lead the procession. Once again, the places and roles of different gender categories are in clearly evident. Men and women walk in strict separation. The active, interactionary role with the sacred is essentially masculine, and it is men who stage the warrior characteristics of the community by a display of *gatka*, an Indian martial art associated with Sikhs. Only children, before they have reached puberty, enjoy unencumbered freedom of movement. Much of what takes place at this outdoor ceremonial procession mirrors what takes place inside Sikh *gurdwaras*.

The apparent distinctions in Sikh gender relations also become clear within the migratory process, as Sikh men are allowed to marry western women, but it is unthinkable that a Sikh woman, even if she already lives in Barcelona, would be permitted to marry a western man. During my fieldwork in Barcelona, I met only three families that included a Punjabi Sikh husband and a wife of Spanish origin. Furthermore, one of these families was polygamous, which is legally punishable in Spain:

Sunil is married to two women. With the first wife—of Spanish origin—he has two daughters. With the second wife, who comes from India, he has an 11-month-old baby. They all live together in the same house. (Fieldnotes, Barcelona, 22 October 2006)

It is very common among Sikh men to first marry a Spanish woman and, after a while and once they have regularized their personal situation, to divorce the Spanish wife and to remarry, choosing a bride who is brought directly from India for this purpose⁴⁸. In the following example, I write about a Sikh man who married an Indian woman following the death of his Spanish spouse; this vignette can serve to expose some of the most entrenched gender beliefs and prejudices that exist among Sikh men:

I was chatting with Naya (a young woman of who is in her early twenties) and her father at the family restaurant. Naya's father was born in Delhi and her mother was born in Punjab. During our conversation, they discussed the case of Sikh men who have married women from Spanish origin. Naya's father pointed out, as he displayed a big smile, that they do it for "the papers"⁴⁹. He talked about his brother, who had married a woman in Barcelona (she was from Cadiz, another Spanish province) and they had two daughters. The wife had died about thirteen years earlier, and he subsequently went to India to find another woman to marry. Now they all live together (the father, his new wife and their offspring and the daughters of his first marriage). According to Naya's father, his brother's daughters have too much freedom; he said he doesn't agree with the amount of freedom that is given to young girls, as it does not reflect well on them or the family. Naya replied that she was of the opposite opinion, and told her father that if he does not like how things are done in Spain, he should have stayed in India. (Fieldnotes, Barcelona, 4 June 2008)

On a separate occasion, an older woman from India suggested to me that mixed marriages are fine, but that since western men do not make good husbands, it is justifiable that Sikh women prefer not to marry European men:

I asked [the elderly Sikh woman] what she thought about Sikh marriages with people from Spain and she replied that she felt they were fine, both in cases of a Spanish bride and a Sikh groom, or vice versa. She then added that Spanish women make good wives, but that

⁴⁸ It is also very common for Sikh men to marry Portuguese women in exchange for money, in order to legalize their personal situation in the EU. According to my informants, the woman who agrees to this kind of marriage receives between 6000 and 9000 euros. My informants told me that couples usually go to Norway to formalize their marriage because the procedures can be resolved in just a few days. Once married, the couple never meets again. In addition, in an unpublished paper entitled "Sikh Migration to Poland and other East European Countries" (presented by Zbigniew Igielski at the "Sikhs in Europe" Conference organized in Sweden in 2010), the author explained that there are many Polish women who migrate to Spain and, once in this country, and upon meeting a Sikh man they wish to marry, they travel back to Poland for the marriage ceremony, since the procedure is more complicated in Spain.

⁴⁹ In Spanish "*los papeles*". *Tener los papeles* (to have papers) or *conseguir los papeles* (to obtain papers) are the colloquial expressions referring to the necessary documentation to become a legal migrant in this country.

Spanish men are not such good husbands: “there are a lot of bad men here”. She also told me that she knew a man from India who had married an older Spanish woman ten years earlier. At the time of the wedding, he was 22 and she was 40. The Spanish woman told my informant that she was happy to marry him and let him go once he had obtained “the papers”. However, the Sikh groom insisted that he loved her and wanted to continue being married to her. (Fieldnotes, Barcelona, 10 December 2006)

The tacit prohibition of marriage between a Sikh woman and a western man is associated with Sikh understandings of filiation. According to Sikh Punjabi customs, the children of any marriage belong to the father’s family; thus, a marriage between a Sikh woman and an outsider could imply that their offspring may be excluded from the kinship group and the Sikh community. This highlights the importance of exerting control over women’s bodies, sexuality, and reproduction, as Foucault⁵⁰ has pointed out. According to Foucault, the regulation of bodies, sexualities, and alliances within communities is oriented towards the maintenance of the social body, something that is achieved by controlling reproduction through marriage and kinship systems. These in turn connect people and regulate the economy through the transfer of assets and family names⁵¹. This is what Foucault described as the control of the population through bio-power techniques, which are capable of “obtaining the subjection of bodies and population control”⁵². It is through the control over women’s bodies and the surveillance of their sexuality that the claim to the offspring is secured and that community’s boundaries maintained.

Power relations and the differential value given to individuals depending on their biological sex also become evident in the uptake and acceptance of certain practices, such as female feticide. Although this is an issue that most Sikhs explicitly avoid in conversation, I was able to communicate with an informant who was particularly sensitive towards this matter and who worked in a health center in Barcelona. As she explained, selective abortions are also practiced in Spain:

Today I was eating with Sitara, before she went to work. As we talked, several interesting topics came to the fore; perhaps the most striking centred on female infanticide. She explained to me that here in Barcelona, just as in India, women in the community practice female feticide, and that they are protected by the legal guarantees afforded by Spanish abortion laws. She told me that she knew of some cases, and since prenatal ultrasounds are very common in this country, it is very easy for the prospective parents to know the sex of the baby. Thus, many Sikh women proceed to have an abortion if they learn they are expecting a girl. (Fieldnotes, 17 December 2007)

If being a woman implies fulfilling certain expectations within the family and the community, being a man also means undertaking specific roles and obligations. The most valued qualities in a man are the ability and the skills to play the role assigned by the family and by society, such as assuming the obligations of being the firstborn male, or to be hard-working. Hard work and doing a good job are highly valued traits within the community. Being a good worker and achieving success and prosperity through work are particularly valued within the community and offer a gateway to recognition and prestige. Having a virile aspect (which usually translates into very straight and upright body posture) and a good bearing and appearance are also socially valued, as they relate to the ideal of the Sikh soldier in the imaginary collective⁵³. In the same way, as stated by Gill for Britain⁵⁴, when analyzed through the lens of masculinity, the *pagh* (turban) is a specific symbol of male honor and a symbol of

⁵⁰ Foucault ([1976] 2006).

⁵¹ Op. Cit., pp. 111–13.

⁵² Ibid., p. 148.

⁵³ This ideal has its maximum expression in the amritdharis or representatives of the khālsā.

⁵⁴ Gill (2014), following Kalra (2005).

pride and manhood particularly for upper-caste Sikh men⁵⁵. Thus the maximum representatives of an honorable masculinity socio-historically constructed⁵⁶ are the *keshdharis* and especially the *amritdharis*. In addition, the community expects both of them to act with honesty and integrity.

5. The Negotiation of Bodily (Re)Presentation and Agency

The manner in which Sikhs have settled in Barcelona has many analogies with the way in which Sikhs and other religious communities stemming from Asia have settled in places such as the USA, UK or Canada, and we can follow these analogies in the works of Judith Brown, Ballard and Ballard, and Gerd Baumann⁵⁷. However, there are also notable differences between the Sikhs in Spain and the Sikh communities in other parts of the world⁵⁸. Therefore, and exercising some caution, we can hypothesize that there may be particular characteristics that are unique to the Sikh community of Barcelona⁵⁹. In this regard, it is important to mention the relevant role played by the creation of *gurdwaras* and also the different forms of negotiations that the Sikhs carry out as individuals but also as a community. As part of these negotiations, we find strategic relationships with members of the local population through the enactment of a sort of “westernized Sikhism”, mediated and made possible by the practice of Kundalini yoga⁶⁰. It can be argued that such practices or processes are examples of hybridization as described by García Canclini⁶¹, or of meeting points or interstices, following Núria Benach⁶². We also find negotiations in the use of specific forms of Sikh clothing and outfits that acquire particular significance in some contexts. In Spain, the Sikhs manage to use their attire in different but pragmatic ways: to settle successfully at the place of arrival, to generate forms of identity, differentiation or identification with other groups, to gain agency, or with the intention of maintaining the values and traditions of their place of origin, as well as the power relations that exist there.

In Barcelona, most Sikhs feel that their corporeal appearance, attire, or traditional bodily practices make their full insertion in Spanish society or their chances to settle successfully, especially in terms of jobs and economics in general, quite difficult. Not only do they perceive that their clothes and outfits may complicate their integration, but these complications also extend to bodily practices, such as the use of henna. In India, henna is used as an element of purification, as well as in ceremonial rituals such as weddings and other celebrations and festivities. In Barcelona, its use is restricted to a minimum and limited to very specific moments (such as weddings), in order to avoid excessive attention from others in their host country, as one young informant explained to me:

And apart from this ... , it is very visible ... , for example, look, henna, I always wear a little, I always wear a little. Because sometimes I put more but ... it attracts a lot of attention and depending on the place it is not accepted very well. People look at you like, ‘hey!, what is this?’,... you know? Well, now henna is beginning to get better known, for instance, in the temporary tattoos that people acquire in the summer. But of course, you could feel intimidated. [When asked if henna is only aesthetic or if it has any other meaning, she answered:] It is very traditional, very traditional, and very purifying, henna is applied to the body at every festival in India, at weddings, at Indian Christmas, well, at every major holiday there is henna ... Here we put it on ourselves, but in India there are dedicated professionals. (Interview with Anju, a Sikh woman in her early twenties, Barcelona, 12 October 2006)

⁵⁵ Garha (2020).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Brown (2006); Ballard and Ballard (1979); and Baumann ([1996] 2003).

⁵⁸ Due to space limitation, we will limit ourselves to minimal observations. See Santos-Fraile (2016).

⁵⁹ See Santos-Fraile (2007, 2013, 2016, 2017).

⁶⁰ These western people belong to the 3HO movement or the Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere. For more information about these groups, see Jakobsh (2008).

⁶¹ García Canclini (2005).

⁶² Benach (2005).

As we can see, the perceived difficulties in social integration implies that Sikhs implement changes in their lives, such as excluding certain attire or practices which they consider traditional, or including alien habits or practices, which may cause some degree of discomfort among the more orthodox Sikhs. Some of these alien, uncomfortable practices include the consumption of alcohol at social events, which is typical of Spanish culture. Or the incorporation of celebrations that mix their culture of origin with local traditions, such as Christmas or New Year's Eve, and which again might involve alcoholic drinks. Changes in dietary patterns are also significant as new foods and ways of cooking are introduced, although often they do not transgress Sikh orthodoxy, particularly, vegetarianism⁶³.

5.1. The Negotiation of Male Bodily Appearance and (Re)Presentation

Since a virile and martial appearance is part of the construction of Sikh masculinity⁶⁴, it is interesting to consider that this construction takes place, on the one hand, both at the individual level and as a member of a collective, and on the other hand, in terms of self-presentation within the community but also vis-à-vis external others. Thus Sikhs display an appearance of body, deportment, and attire that, in Shilling's terms⁶⁵, must represent the very embodiment of power:

(...) Berger's argument (1972) that a man's presence (be it fabricated or real) is dependent on the promise of power he embodies... If a man's physicality is unable to convey an image of power, he is found to have little presence precisely because the social definition of men as holders of power is not reflected in his embodiment.

It is important to note that the embodiment of power does not always have to occur purely through the development of a powerful body... It has other variants which incorporate such elements as posture, height, weight, walk, dress, etc.⁶⁶.

In principle, wearing a turban and keeping a well-groomed beard presents a strong masculine image, as does walking with a straight carriage. However, we find that in Barcelona, wearing the turban and not cutting one's hair or beard is a matter for negotiation within the community and also in the context of the host society. After their arrival in Barcelona, many Sikhs who wear beards and turbans decide to get rid of them or at least modify them⁶⁷, as they consider that this physical appearance prevents them from accessing opportunities in the job market. In some cases, changes such as the giving up of the beard and the turban are also accompanied by changes in other bodily practices such as the ingestion of meat and alcohol, which are taboo among orthodox Sikhs. Many Sikh men feel that changes in their appearance and comportment are not voluntary but forced by circumstances, as it was explained to me by a male informant in his early forties who was quite orthodox in his beliefs and practices:

Surjeet has told me that when he arrived in Barcelona, he spent six years eating meat and drinking alcohol, although he kept his beard trimmed and wore a turban⁶⁸. According to him, he was forced to act in this way by circumstances, since he lived with a family who ate meat and drank alcohol, and he could neither refuse food nor demand that they prepare something special for him. According to him, he only had one glass of whiskey at a time,

⁶³ Often there is some form of relaxation in the beliefs and practices of younger Sikh generations who are born and bred in Spain. This becomes evident in the acquisition of new culinary tastes among them: for instance, they might be more likely to eat meat than their Indian-born counterparts, and they might express a clear preference for local foods, as is the case of "*pollo al ast*", a typical Catalan roast chicken, eggs with chips, and even fast food served at places like McDonalds which often include meat (although in India, many fast food places like McDonalds have adapted their wares to include vegetarian food).

⁶⁴ Garha (2020).

⁶⁵ Shilling ([1993] 2005).

⁶⁶ (Shilling [1993] 2005, pp. 99–100).

⁶⁷ For instance, keeping the turban and a short beard.

⁶⁸ Some friends of Surjeet confirmed to me that he had cut his beard and also removed his turban, somewhat contradicting his own explanations.

since a second glass always made him sick. He also explained that drinking alcohol makes you ignore other things and that now that he no longer drinks, he can do other things, like sitting with his daughter at night eating sunflower seeds. When he drank whisky, he said, he would concentrate solely on his drink and would be unable to share significant moments with others. He also says that when his daughter was a baby, he bathed her every night and massaged her legs so that she slept well, and that if he had been drinking at that time, he could not have done this. He tells me that at one point he realized that something was not going well with him, and he thought that it was time to stop. He thought things were going wrong for specific reasons such as eating meat, drinking alcohol, etc. (Fieldnotes, Barcelona, 31 August 2007)

Sikhs are very clear about the importance of dressing well to ensure their success in the process of adaptation to the arrival context⁶⁹. As was the case with Surjeet, men tend to revert to a more orthodox type of dress when the need abates: for instance, when they achieve some economic independence (such as owning their business) and a modicum of home stability after family reunification. Likewise, we can observe that as the community grows and becomes more stable in geographical and demographic terms, many of those who had once renounced orthodox bodily practices return to them. Moreover, orthodox beliefs and practices are, at times, incorporated by community members who had never followed them before. In recent times, when the number of Sikhs has grown substantially and their communities in Barcelona and surrounding areas have been established for a considerable amount of time, it is easy to find Sikhs who had never before worn turbans or beards but now choose to display them in order to better integrate and position themselves favorably within the Sikh community. In other diaspora locations, such as the UK, a stronger commitment to a traditional Sikh appearance grew following the events that took place in India in 1984⁷⁰ and also as more Sikhs took part in youth camps or Sikh university associations⁷¹. However, in the Spanish context, the Sikh community has only recently arrived, and they are still in the process of working out how they want to present themselves to the others. These circumstances condition the decision-making processes in terms of committing to, or avoiding, traditional Sikh appearance. The same considerations apply to the wearing of turbans among women. While Sikh women from the Indian diaspora may be donning the turban, in part as a result of the influence of Sikh websites (as argued by Jakobsh⁷²) in Spain it is unusual to see a Sikh woman wearing a turban, except in cases of Gora Sikhs, that is, western women who converted to Sikhism. In fact, since the beginning of my research, I have never heard of or seen any Sikh women of Indian origin who wore a turban in Spain.

The geographic and demographic expansion of the Sikh community in Spain and the increase in the number of Sikhs who wear beards and turbans puts them in a better position to manage and negotiate beard and turban use in the context of the wider society. If early on the *keshdharis* chose to eliminate beards and turbans, today, the consolidation of Sikhs in the new context allows them to defend their right to be recognized as a distinct group and to wear attire which signifies their ethnic-religious identity. Many Sikh men have complained about discriminatory treatment at some Spanish airports when they have been forced to remove their turban due to national security measures. An analogous situation regarding the negotiation of Sikh bodily attires happens when Sikhs appeal to representatives of the local administration, in order to ask them for special dispensations. For instance, a technician in migration policies from the General Directorate of Religious Affairs at the Generalitat of Catalunya (the autonomous Catalanian government) told me that Sikh representatives went to him

⁶⁹ As an example of this flexibility of attire depending on the context, the same informants who would always dress in a suit (or pants and shirt) in Barcelona would wear *kurta pyjamas* on a regular basis in the Punjab.

⁷⁰ Jakobsh (2008).

⁷¹ Singh (2011).

⁷² *Ibíd.*

to discuss the possibility of Sikhs wearing their turbans for the official photograph required for the National Identity Card⁷³.

On other occasions, it is the Sikhs themselves who introduce changes in the shapes or sizes of items considered essential for their attire, taking into account the legislation of the country of arrival. This is the case of the *kirpan* (traditional Sikh sword or dagger). For instance, some *amritdharis* have replaced their traditional *kirpan* with small neck pendants. Similarly, leaving the *kirpan* in the custody of security guards at public buildings does not seem to be a major inconvenience for *amritdharis*, yet they make prior arrangements with the administration whenever possible in order to avoid having to take them off.

Apart from these modifications or negotiations regarding religious attire or items with which some Sikh men identify, we also find changes in the use of clothes and style of dressing. Some Sikh men vary their appearance depending on the context in which they find themselves. In Barcelona, they wear “western”⁷⁴ clothes daily; however, when they are in the private sphere of their homes, and when they attend the temple on Sundays, Sikh men wear *kurta pyjamas*, especially if they are participating in the religious liturgy.

5.2. The Use of Agency among Young Sikh Women

I argued earlier that the separation of spaces according to gender seems to gain importance in the diaspora, and it seems to be related to the size of Sikh communities and to the length of time that the community has been settled in the new migratory context. In addition, women seem to have a less active or agentive role in the practice of *seva* in places where Sikh communities have only recently arrived, while permission to participate increases in places where the Sikh have been settled for a longer time. This situation may seem paradoxical, and yet it brings us back to the concept of *emergence* as proposed by Williams⁷⁵, as we can interpret these differences in terms of the negotiations that take place at different times in diverse migratory contexts.

On the one hand, early negotiations within recently established Sikh communities enforce limits and create structural habits through the delimitation of spaces and restrictions in their use according to gender; yet on the other hand, long term negotiations must necessarily allow for certain flexibility, as is the case in the practice of *seva* by Sikh women in London. However, women are always expected to respect the limitations in space and in the activities allowed them, which are defined by ritual ideology and practice. Women’s negotiations in being allowed more significant and visible roles in Sikh ritual and representation happens in the context of a social and cultural tension where women’s agency and demands are supported by the political and social situation that surrounds them. This can be seen in the case of the UK, where several generations of Sikhs have been socialized in the country of arrival, and Sikh women find alternative strategies and more transcultural tools with which to negotiate their situation and their roles within the community. This increased capacity for negotiation has been facilitated by a greater female presence in the public sphere, as a result of the progressive incorporation of women in the labor market. As Judith Brown⁷⁶ explains, the role that Sikh women have played in the family economy (as in the case of Southeast Asian women in general) has been transformed as part of the diasporic process:

Women in South Asia had always contributed fundamentally to the family economy in many ways but paid work outside the home or the family farm was less usual and often felt as

⁷³ It should be noted that these claims regarding the use of the turban in Spain are still at an early stage when compared to claims that have been made for decades in the UK; see Beetham (1970).

⁷⁴ However, as Emma Tarlo explains, western clothes have long been introduced to male Indian wardrobes, and they are often considered part of contemporary Indian fashion (1996, p. 331).

⁷⁵ Williams (1997).

⁷⁶ Brown (2006).

demeaning to family honor. Increasingly in the new situation abroad, women also became involved in paid work of various kinds⁷⁷.

In this same work, Brown points out that paid female work outside the family context has resulted not only in an increase in the socio-purchasing power of families but also in the empowerment of women⁷⁸. However, this empowerment, as Brown⁷⁹ notes, continues to be significantly limited when we consider them within the framework of gender relations. However, this does not prevent women from using their agency in varying circumstances.

My work in Spain shows (and this is similar to what Meenakshi Thapan explains in the context of Northern Italy⁸⁰) that young Sikh women that grew up in this new migratory context question the roles that men and women play more often and in a more vigorous manner. Young women particularly recognize the importance of their economic and personal independence. The generalized belief among newly migrated Sikh families that women's education is valuable gives young women a new position from which to develop their agency, as they strategically extend their studies, obtain the best possible qualifications, and argue for the need to continue with their training. Through this extension of their education, they crucially get to postpone the time of marriage, despite assuming that marriage will inevitably be arranged and that they will accept their parents' wishes. Even when they are of marrying age (that is, between 18 and 23 years old), young Sikh women are deliberately deferring their nuptials by stretching the time they spend in education⁸¹ while simultaneously holding jobs related to their acquired professions. This strategy allows them to postpone this event that they know will be key and critical in their lives. Young Sikh women are aware that their perception of relationships is substantially different from that of their parents; in addition, they explicitly assume that there will be conflicts if and when they marry a Sikh man from India, as the young women already know that there will be a significant cultural distance between them. The fact that young Sikh women are purposefully delaying their marriages does not mean that they are not able to maintain secret but stable relationships with men of their choice, both in Barcelona and in India, before an actual marriage takes place. In some cases, unauthorized couples go as far as getting engaged and performing some commitment rituals in order to signal their allegiance to themselves. In many cases, when the family uncovers these secret relationships, usually through another member of the Sikh community, the rebellious young women are severely punished, even though physical violence, and may be forced into an early marriage to avoid further "deviations".

Meanwhile, significant supervision and control are exercised over daughters. This control does not decrease with their coming of age, but rather increases as they approach the age of marriage, in keeping with the status and the roles assigned to young marriageable women in India. Sikh girls and young women can not go out alone or during the night, and their friendships or any other type of relationship are surveilled and vetted; this applies even to working relationships. If a young woman dares to contravene the norms, control, and sanction mechanisms are activated to resolve the situation and to punish the unruly young woman, who is normally sent to India, where it is assumed that she will incorporate the values and attitudes expected of her. Likewise, an early marriage, it is hoped, will be arranged to distance her from other possible violations of the customary regulations. This was the case of Naya, who was taken to India after meeting with a man for an evening outing. It was the man's friends who betrayed her to her family, and Naya had to stay in India for three years, during which time her family arranged a marriage for her.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 61.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 70–71.

⁷⁹ *Op. Cit.*

⁸⁰ Thapan (2015).

⁸¹ The fact that they strive to be good students becomes a strong argument for the family to allow the extension of their studies, understanding that this will represent a significant increase in symbolic capital, which in turn will have a positive impact on the family.

However, young Sikh women in Barcelona find spaces or strategies to avoid the restrictions imposed and managed by men and adult women in their community, controls that are, in many cases, exercised through their bodies and bodily appearance. For example, when young Sikh women are away from the direct influence and control of other members of their community, they take the opportunity to modify their clothing by removing the pants that they wear under dresses, or openly displaying garments with plunging necklines or shoulder straps. In addition, social networks like Facebook or Orkut are places where they present themselves in the ways in which they want to be seen, skipping the strict rules applied to their comportment. Through these social networks, they upload photographs of themselves in miniskirts, bikinis, or other garments that are strictly forbidden to them.

Other strategies serve to carry out activities that are similarly censured, such as going out at night. As my informants explained to me, young Sikh women resort to methods that I have not been able to corroborate, such as drugging their parents with sleeping pills or escaping through windows. They also phone their boyfriends or lovers and meet up with them secretly, as I have witnessed. The strategies that these women carry out to be able to find these spaces for freedom can become truly complex and risky. This was the case of an informant who went on vacation to an island with friends. She told her parents that she was participating in a mandatory training course related to her profession and that it was organized by a Spanish university. She had to falsify several documents of invitation, accommodation, and accreditation to justify her attendance. The risk that some of these women are willing to take is not a trivial matter, given the probable consequences and punishments they face if found out, such as physical aggression, or forced and immediate marriage to avoid shame and loss of honor for the young woman and her family. When my informant came back from her secret, unauthorized holiday, she explained to me that for the first time in her life, she had experienced a feeling of freedom. She also told me that, from then, her perception of the world and of her own life, as well as of the city in which she lives (Barcelona), had changed. As I wrote in my fieldnotes, "*she told me that neither now nor ever would she and the world be the same*".

6. Conclusions

Throughout this article, I have reflected on specific issues regarding the way in which the Sikh community in Barcelona and its individual members perceive, question, and manage their identity in a new migratory context. The notion of the body and the descriptions of changes and negotiations in bodily appearance have allowed us to view and understand how they manage their process of settlement in the new context, as well as their relationships within the community and their connections with others outside it and with the wider society. Through the management of their bodies and appearances, newly arrived Sikh men and women situate themselves within and outside of their community, as they strategically manage their lives to unfold in the new context. I have used the notions of bodily control and physical management to analyze aspects of the social and cultural realities in which individuals find themselves in migratory contexts and to describe some of the constraints and opportunities that are afforded to them in the new situations. My arguments contribute to the understanding of the diverse processes that are involved in the constitution of individual and group identities in transnational mobility contexts. I have also presented the notion of agency in order to assess the capacity for initiative and for cultural transformation of gendered individuals in migratory contexts. For this, gender relations have been taken into account as a basic framework.

I have described how the roles of men and women among some Sikhs in Barcelona are perfectly differentiated and articulated and have attempted to explain how the constitution and management of gendered bodies reinforce these roles that are both culturally established and socially controlled. Thus, in the context of migration of Sikhs to Spain, hierarchies, subordination, and forms of control over women are reinforced, and the power exerted by men over women becomes even more entrenched; power is also further exercised by those maintaining orthodox identities (and, therefore, considered purer) over those who move away from it.

In short, I have found that gendered bodies are imbued with power relations, and that choice and changes in corporeal expression and (re)presentation must be linked to an intentionality within the framework of power relations. Furthermore, I have shown that among Sikhs in Spain, there is a persistence of norms regarding gender roles within families, but that young Sikh women express and display a significantly lower acceptance of the implicit ideals and rules, as illustrated throughout this article. Finally, I argue that the space of immigration to Spain is a context that affords a multiplicity of interstices that permit and encourage the use of new forms of agency among young Sikh women who come to live there.

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