

IDENTITIES OF ARAB MUSLIM GRADUATE STUDENTS:
SPACES, DISCOURSES, AND PRACTICES AT A CANADIAN UNIVERSITY

by

BAYAN NAIF QUTUB

B.A. in English, Umm Al-Qura University, 2008

MHA, La Trobe University, 2011

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Educational Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

September 2018

© BAYAN NAIF QUTUB, 2018

The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, a thesis/dissertation entitled:

Identities of Arab Muslim graduate students: spaces, discourses, and practices at a Canadian university

submitted by Bayan Naif Qutub in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Art

in Educational Studies

Examining Committee:

Lesley Andres, Educational Studies

Supervisor

Mona Gleason, Educational Studies

Supervisory Committee Member

Supervisory Committee Member

Fei Wang, Educational Studies

Additional Examiner

Additional Supervisory Committee Members:

Supervisory Committee Member

Supervisory Committee Member

Abstract

Arab Muslim graduate students in Canadian universities continue to grow in large numbers; however, this group of students face several challenges related to their cultural and religious identity. This phenomenological study examines the lived experiences of 10 Arab Muslim graduate students at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Canada. Particularly, in this research I sought to understand how these students describe their cultural and religious identity and how they experience their cultural and religious identity construction within the context of the university, including its spaces, discourses, and practices. Two main questions concern the study: 1. What are the individual perceptions of Arab Muslim graduate students on the construction of their cultural and religious identity within UBC? 2. How do Arab Muslim graduate students perceive the university's spaces, discourses, and practices in (de)constructing their cultural and religious identities?

Findings show that these students face several challenges on-campus. Arab Muslim graduate students face academic challenges in adopting to the Canadian learning environment. All female students reported facing discriminative remarks related to their cultural and religious identity sometime during their stay in Canada. In addition, students with families were limited in their participation at the non-academic activities in UBC. Furthermore, Arab Muslim graduate students understand their cultural identities in relation to religion, nationality, and culture. However, some had essentialist views while others had constructivist views. Despite the differences, students expressed similar needs for religious and cultural integration on-campus. Students also revealed that the university's policies, dialogues, and personnel advocate diversity and student empowerment at the individual level. However, there is a need for the university to empower and support Arab Muslim students as a group. The Muslim Students Association (MSA)

as well as students' clubs play a role in integrating the religious and cultural identities for some Arab Muslim Graduate students. Finally, the study recommends that the university should offer "small acts of kindness" including providing distributed prayer places on campus, providing a cultural Islamic center, including Muslim students among the diversity initiatives, and raising awareness on-campus about Islamophobia to make the campus a safe and inclusive space for all minority students.

Lay Summary

With the rising atmosphere of Islamophobia in the past decade, Arab Muslim students have been facing discriminative challenges on-campus around the globe. This study seeks a detailed understanding of the experiences that Arab Muslim graduate students have on-campus, including the challenges, the feelings, the understandings and the reflections on their identity in terms of the culture and religion within the context of the Canadian university.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, B. Qutub.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Lay Summary	v
Preface.....	vi
Table of Contents	vii
List of Tables	xii
Acknowledgements.....	xiii
Dedication	xv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Background	2
1.2 Purpose of the Study	4
1.3 Research Questions	5
1.4 Significance.....	6
1.5 Structure of the Thesis	9
Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework	12
2.1 Literature Review.....	13
1. Experiences of Arab Muslims in the West	13
2. Experiences of Arab Muslim Students in Western Post-Secondary Institutions	14
3. The Campus.....	16

2.2 Theoretical Framework	20
1. Identity.....	20
a. The Muslim Identity	22
b. The Cultural Identity	23
c. Spatiality of the Muslim Identity.....	24
2.3 Chapter Conclusion.....	25
Chapter 3: Research Design.....	27
3.1 Methodological Approach: Phenomenology	28
3.2 Positionality of the researcher.....	28
3.3 Positionality of the participants	30
3.4 Sampling	32
3.5 Research Site.....	37
3.6 Data Collection	37
3.7 Reflections on the medium of communication	38
3.8 Data Analysis	42
3.9 Validity	43
1. Bracketing	43
2. Member-check.....	45
3.10 Chapter Conclusion.....	45
Chapter 4: Findings.....	46

4.1 Chapter Introduction	47
4.2 Academic challenges in adapting to the Canadian learning environment	49
4.3 The influence of the visible Muslim identity on students' experiences.....	51
4.4 The influence of family on the academic experience	53
4.5 Perceptions of cultural identity and the integration of religion, culture, and nationality ...	54
4.6 Constructing and reconstructing the Muslim identity.....	57
4.7 The campus reflecting religious and cultural experiences of students	61
a. Spaces	61
i. The need for religious integration on-campus	61
ii. The need for cultural integration on-campus.....	63
iii. The experience of on-campus housing	64
b. Discourses	66
i. A sense of student empowerment	66
ii. The influence of the field of study on students experiencing their cultural identity .	69
c. Practices.....	70
4.8 Chapter Conclusion.....	72
Chapter 5: Discussion, Practical Implications, Limitations, Recommendations and Conclusion	74
5.1 Chapter Introduction	75
5.2 Relationship of the Findings to Literature and Theoretical Implications	76
1. Academic challenges to adapt to the Canadian learning environment.....	76

2. The influence of the visible Muslim Identity on students' experiences	78
3. The influence of family on the academic experience	78
4. Perceptions of the cultural identity and the integration of religion, culture, and nationality	79
5. Constructing and reconstructing the Muslim identity	80
6. The campus reflecting religious and cultural experiences of students	81
a. Spaces	82
i. A need for religious integration on-campus	82
ii. A need for cultural integration on-campus	83
iii. The experience of on-campus housing	84
b. Discourses	85
i. A sense of empowerment.....	86
ii. The influence of the disciplines on student's experiencing their cultural identities..	86
C. Practices	87
5.3 Practical Implications of the Findings	87
5.4 Limitations of the Study.....	90
5.5 Recommendations for Future Research	92
5.6 Chapter Conclusion.....	94
Bibliography	95
Appendix A.....	102

Recruitment Poster.....	102
Appendix B.....	103
Consent Form.....	103
Appendix C.....	107
Interview Questions	107
Interview Questions in Arabic	109

List of Tables

Table 1 Profile of Participants.....	34
--------------------------------------	----

Acknowledgements

The story behind this thesis started with the beginning of taking my classes at the department of Educational Studies at UBC. Throughout EDST courses, I have been exposed to many ideas that opened my mind and contributed to shift the way I used to think. It was the big idea of Truth vs truths that impacted me the most. UBC is a truly learning place and EDST is one of its representations. Each course that I have taken has its unique addition to my learning. Each instructor is a valuable person. Whenever I meet one, I remember what I learnt from him/her and begin writing my acknowledgement page of my thesis in my head.

I deeply thank and acknowledge my supervisor, Professor Lesley Andres, who opened the EDST door for me. Thank you, Lesley, for your constant support, encouragement and for always being there for me. Thank you for creating a safe space for me to research. You have been a good example of a supervisor who I believe will have all her students succeed. I am filled with gratitude. I acknowledge and thank Professor Mona Gleason for believing in my thesis and approving my proposal despite its missing literature review, for granting me the MA award, and for her constant support. I acknowledge Dr. Fei Wang for taking part of my defense as an external committee member. I acknowledge, Dr. Rob VanWynsberghe, for he was the first one to review my first draft of my proposal. I acknowledge, Dr. Jason Ellis, for making me believe in my writing style. I acknowledge, Professor Andre Mazawi, an academic father, who taught me public pedagogies, showed me the hidden spaces of learning, and who compelled my writing ability to produce a publishable paper. I acknowledge, Dr. Amy Metcalfe, who created in me a critical lens to look into the university and its spaces. I acknowledge, Dr. Shan Hongxia, for her critical review and for her open heart and instant support when I knocked her door. I acknowledge, Professor Deirdre Kelly, for teaching me how to conduct an academic interview. I acknowledge, Professor Handel Wright,

who showed me the other side of multiculturalism. I acknowledge, Professor Ali Abdi, whom I was honored to be a speaker twice in his presence. The Department of Educational Studies is unique because of its people.

I thank and acknowledge my two good friends Lauren Oakley and Bernard Chan for accompanying me throughout my MA journey. I admire your sharp minds and good souls. I wish you all the best in your studies and your lives. I also would like to thank and acknowledge the participants in this study.

A special thank you and gratitude to my brilliant, loving, and supportive husband, Ahmad Fawzi Arbaeen, for the sacrifices he has made for the last three years as I pursued this degree. A heartily thank you for my two little angels, Sidrah and Hashim, who brighten my days with their love and color my heart with their rainbow joy. My love and gratitude extend to my mom and dad for their forever support and love and to my sisters and brothers for being always there for me.

Dedication

To those of us who feel different, unheard,

Muslims and non-Muslims,

Arabs and non-Arabs,

To the (other) students on campuses around the globe,

You matter.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Identity is a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative. It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself.

Stuart Hall

1.1 Background

It was November 2015. Breaking news on TV screens, tweets on computers and smart phones, newspaper headlines, and people on the street spread the shocking news of the Paris attacks. Away from France, in the Western side of Canada, in Vancouver I was a graduate student who had just started her MA program. I remember hearing the news first through a typical phone call from my father in Saudi Arabia. I did not pay much attention to it as it seemed to me one among many frequent sad news stories around the world of terrorist attacks. However, as I eventually was exposed more to the news, the talks, hearing about the security states in France and Europe, reading about the group who was accused of the attacks, and learning about more details, I became increasingly anxious. The accused group were individuals affiliated with an extremist Islamic group known as ISIS “Islamic State of Iraq and Syria.” I had neither any relation to this group nor had I, or any relative of mine, been affected by their attacks. Everything in my life seemed fine, yet I was not. I was agitated, shaken, and distressed.

I had two classes in my first semester that started on September 2015 in the Masters program in the department of Educational Studies in the University of British Columbia (UBC). I would attend classes two days a week from 4:30 pm to 7:30 pm so I would go out slightly before sunset and come back home at dark. This means many things to me as a Muslim woman who wears a hijab. As a Muslim, I have an Al-Maghreb prayer to perform [translated as “the dusk” prayer] that usually would take about 3 minutes to be performed but within a limited time period from sunset to dark that is about 30 to 45 minutes. As a woman who wears a hijab, I became increasingly anxious about the revealing trait my clothing appearance has in respect of my cultural/religious identity. The building I used to study at during that semester was a temporary two-storey, old one that had small rooms of offices and classrooms, a narrow hallway, and a relatively small area that

has small semi-kitchen for students to sit and eat. I remember finding it difficult to pray at first due to the small spaces available that are usually busy, but then later in the semester particularly after Paris events, I realized that I became more cautious about praying in a public area or going to an empty room to pray. I remember my “what if” thoughts. What if somebody sees me entering a room alone and suspects I am doing something bad? What if somebody would harm me because of my physical appearance (linking the hijab to extremist groups)? The second thought accompanied me more during my walk back to home in the dark. I remember how I would be grateful for the rainy nights where I would look like everyone else with my hijab covered under my hoody.

While nothing bad ever happened to me following the Paris attacks and all the thoughts and fears were in my head, my experience that semester triggered many questions for me about university spaces, students’ cultural and religious identities, students’ experiences, the university’s role in shaping students’ experiences, and contributing factors to changes in students’ sense of cultural and religious identity. I wondered about all of these. I wondered how the sense of cultural and/or religious identities of students like myself change. I wondered what factors contribute to shaping, reshaping, and transforming their sense of cultural and religious identity. I wondered whether Canadian universities are spaces to construct or to deconstruct the cultural and religious identities of students. I wondered how the university acknowledges/denies students’ cultural and religious identities. I wondered how these students experience their cultural and religious identities within the Western dominant culture.

This was not my first experience being in a Western higher education institution. I began my journey in Western universities as a graduate student and as a wife of a graduate student nine years ago. In this journey, I held different positions; I initially was a student, married but with no

kids, I then finished my graduate study but remained a spouse of a graduate student and held a part-time job and became a mom. I later enrolled again to be a full-time graduate student and a mom of two kids. During my journey, I always lived the student life as the Arab Muslim female graduate student/student's spouse in Western universities. Being in the graduate student context has been part of who I am for about a decade. However, my sense of my cultural and religious identity is changing, more rapidly lately. I wonder why. I wonder if these changes are merely personal or rather collective. Do most Arab Muslim students go through similar changes? Is there a collective questioning of Arab Muslim cultural and/or religious identity when being in the West particularly in Western higher education institutions? What roles does the university play in these felt changes?

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The story I related above is not the first of its kind nor will it be the last. For a long time, Arab Muslim students have comprised a minority group in Western universities. It became a prominent phenomenon after the 9/11 incident in 2001 that Arab Muslim students have been stigmatized, felt insecure, and faced discrimination. Many studies, theses, and dissertations responded through negotiating Arab/Muslim, either represented by one term or by both, students' and non-students' identities (e.g., Al-Amrani, 2011; Ewing, 2008; Majumdar, 2010; Marvasti, 2005; Mason & Matella, 2014; and Qusti, 2016). Most of these studies were conducted in the United States and focused on students' social life experiences within the broader context of living in the West, but with no special consideration to the context of a university. Similar to these studies, I intend to explore Arab Muslim students' cultural and religious identities, but within the context of the university. I intend to consider the university's spaces as the ground on which the study's

negotiations will stand. I wish to explore students' perceptions of the role the university plays in shaping the sense of cultural and religious identity among Arab Muslim students. Hence, my study will shed light on the perceptions of Arab Muslim graduate students at the University of British Columbia on the construction of their cultural and religious identity within the context of the university.

1.3 Research Questions

In my exploration of the sense of cultural and religious identity among Arab Muslim graduate students at UBC, I endeavour to explore two main questions:

Main question 1:

What are the individual perceptions of Arab Muslim graduate students on the construction of their cultural and religious identity within UBC?

Sub-questions:

What kinds of experiences do Arab Muslim graduate students have that may relate to their sense of cultural and religious identity?

How do these experiences change the way these students perceive their cultural and religious identity?

Main question 2:

How do Arab Muslim graduate students perceive the university's spaces, discourses, and practices in (de)constructing their cultural and religious identity?

Sub-questions:

To what extent do Arab Muslim graduate students attribute changes in their cultural and religious identity to the university?

In what ways do the university's spaces, discourses, and practices arise in students' narratives?

1.4 Significance

Arab Muslim students are among several minority groups in Canada whose particular issues are not receiving enough recognition. There is not enough research questioning the identity of Arab Muslim students in Canadian universities. Moreover, there is a lack of investigating Western universities' spaces as the basis for negotiating students' identities in the scholarly literature.

This research has personal significance as it will give voice to myself and to my peers as Arab Muslim graduate students in Western higher education institutions. It also holds social significance and originates as a reaction to many factors contributing to the problematic of (mis)representation of cultural and religious identity of Arab Muslim students. Among these factors are the geopolitical dynamics occurring currently in the Middle East of war and political instability that push families to migrate in the hope of achieving better lives in Western countries such as Canada. Unfortunately, this results in increasing psychological struggle of students coming from politically unstable countries. For example, Khozaei, Naidu, Khozaei, & Salleh (2015) say that Graduate students from the Middle East who are pursuing their degrees abroad, specifically those whose country suffers from war or political instabilities, tend to have extra psychologically associated barriers which students from politically-stable countries are unlikely to have. Those students report that their minds were affected by the political instability in their country and thus

were distracted, which had affected their study progress. Thus, there is a need for Canadian universities to offer accommodation and service to international students from unstable countries in the Middle East especially with the emerging drift to “internationalization” among Canadian universities. Beside their wellbeing issues, culture and religion comprise important meanings to these students that the Canadian universities may want to address and serve in their move toward internationalization which is defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions (primarily teaching/learning, research, service) or delivery of higher education ” (Knight, 2013, p. 85). Hence, integrating the cultural aspects of Arab Muslim students into the policies and acts of the university provides a dual advantage for both the Arab Muslim students on Canadian campuses and the Canadian Universities in their attempts towards offering internationalized campuses.

In addition, because Canada ranks as the world’s seventh most popular destination for international students (CBIE, 2015), enrollment of international students in Canadian educational institutions is increasing from 159,426 in 2003 to 293,505 in 2013, which is a significant increase of 84%. Of the 293,505 international students studying in Canada, over half (55%) are studying at universities. The Middle East and North Africa countries (MENA) comprise 10% of international students studying in Canada. Among these students are the Syrian refugees who comprise large numbers of refugees recently. The Government of Canada resettled 29,207 Syrian refugees between the period of November 4, 2015 and July 17, 2016 and will continue to welcome and resettle more (Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), 2016). Indeed, Some Canadian higher education institutions supported refugee students through partnering with the Student Refugee Program (SRP) that was established by World University Service of Canada (WUSC) since 1978. In 2016, 61 Canadian post-secondary institutions enrolled 86 refugee students. Ten of these

enrolled students were from Syria (WUSC, 2016). It is noteworthy that the support these institutions offer is institutional-based and varies from one institution to another. Such initiatives and attempts to increase the numbers of refugees into Canadian higher education institutions necessitate investigating the preparedness of the university's context to absorb these students' cultural and religious identities. Moreover, policies and initiatives on internationalization need to be critically inspected and analyzed to ensure the international, intercultural, and global integration that the universities attempt to apply.

Furthermore, a not too recent social phenomenon that has been intensely reinforced by media is the distorted image of Arab Muslims in the West and the debunked attempts to link every terrorist act to Islam and to the Arab Muslim population. Such repeated broadcasts of headline news condemning Islam for these terrorist acts, which Islam itself condemns, has certainly affected both non-Muslim and Muslim communities in the West. On the one hand, it has increased Islamophobia and discrimination, and perpetuated a misrepresented image of Muslims and Arabs among Western communities. On the other hand, it has brought a sense of fear, shakiness, stigmatization, and mistrust of religious and cultural identity among Arab Muslim people living in Western communities. Recent political events following Trump's presidency contributed to raise existing Islamophobia which negatively impacts Muslim students. The scholarly literature responds to the distressing executive orders – on the travel ban of the seven Muslim countries – of the President of the United States through investigating the increasing atmosphere of Islamophobia (Jamal, 2017; Rose-Redwood, & Rose-Redwood, 2017; Stanbrook, 2017; Nguyen & Kebede, 2017). However, there is a continuing urgency to research the impact of the Islamophobic atmosphere on students especially those who identify as Muslims, to investigate the on-campus

experiences of Muslim students, to explore the attempts made by the university to address the issue of Islamophobia, and to ensure the campus to be a safe place for Muslim and non-Muslim students.

1.5 Structure of the Thesis

In this introductory chapter of the thesis, I started by narrating a personal story which compelled my thinking to reconsider my assumptions about my cultural and religious identity, and to reconsider my assumption of the campus to be active rather than passive. The story transcends myself to my peers of Arab Muslim graduate students at UBC. Hence, it is the purpose of this study to explore Arab Muslim students' cultural and religious identities on-campus. This chapter also included research questions as well as the significance of the study. This chapter is followed by four subsequent chapters.

In Chapter 2, I review the primary bodies of scholarly literature on the experiences of Arab Muslims who live in the West in general, and specifically on the experiences of Arab Muslim students in Western post-secondary institutions. I also examine the scholarly research on students' experiences of the campus from three angles as deduced from Lefebvre's spatial triad theory; spaces, discourses, and practices. In addition, I examine identity construction theories through the works of Stuart Hall and Benedict Anderson to better understand the identity construction process of Arab Muslim graduate students. My understanding of how Arab Muslim students (re)construct and understand their cultural and religious identities is better done by utilizing Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad as the framework of this study.

In Chapter 3, I examine phenomenology as the methodological approach to this study. I locate the positionality of the researcher as well as the participants. I provide details on the

sampling of the study which is summarized in Table 1, and on the research site. Following that, I describe the method of interviewing that I use as the main data collection method of this thesis. I follow the description of data collection by reflecting on the medium of communication. Then, I describe data analysis, and finally describe the means of validity I use in this study.

In Chapter 4, I discuss findings emerging from interviewing 10 Arab Muslim graduate students at UBC. I discuss six main themes and support them by quotes. Findings include; academic challenges in adapting to the Canadian learning environment, the influence of the visible Muslim identity on students' experiences, the influence of family on the academic experience, perceptions of cultural identity and the integration of religion, culture, and nationality, constructing and reconstructing the Muslim identity, and the campus reflecting religious and cultural experiences of students. Detailed findings on the latter theme include; (1) spaces where there is a need for religious integration on-campus, a need for cultural integration on-campus, and the experience of on-campus housing; (2) discourses offering a sense of empowerment, and the influence of the disciplines on student's experiencing their cultural identities; and (3) practices within the MSA as well as Students Clubs integrating the religious and cultural identities for Arab Muslim Graduate students.

In Chapter 5, I consider the relationship of the findings to that of the literature discussed in this study while I examine the findings through the lens of a spatial triad framework and the concept of identity construction. In addition, I describe the practical implications of the findings for university's administration, international student practitioners, student affairs administrators, and educators towards providing more effective services for Arab Muslim graduate students at UBC specifically and Canadian Universities generally. Then, I discuss the limitations of this study.

I follow that by providing recommendations for further study and future research. Finally, I end the final chapter with a conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

We are not makers of history. We are made by history.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

2.1 Literature Review

1. Experiences of Arab Muslims in the West

Issues like stigmatization, insecurity, and discrimination became the norm for Arabs and Muslims living in the West especially post 9/11. In his book *Being and Belonging: Muslims in the US since 9/11*, Ewing (2008) undertook an extensive exploration of American Muslims in the US to shed light on how their religious affiliations served as a barrier to their ability to fit in. Although more than 15 years have passed since the incident, Arab Muslims in the West still carry a sense of stigmatization and insecurity. There is a prolific body of scholarly literature on the long-term effects of the events of 9/11 on Arabs and Muslims within the broader context of living their lives in the US. Qusti (2016), for example, interviewed 12 Arab Americans and Saudi citizens about their experiences before, during, and after 9/11 and the meanings and challenges of these events on their lives. Arab Americans experienced confusion about the incidents, became more cautious interacting with people, felt a need to defend themselves, and some left the country to work or study elsewhere in Asia or Europe (Qusti, 2016).

Mason & Matella (2014) investigated the increased sense of racialization among Arab Muslims living in the US following 9/11 incidents. They found that such negative events discouraged Arab and Muslim Americans from acculturating into the dominant racial identity norms – that is, to self-identify their race with White Americans. Although such arguments promoting acculturalization, meaning to conform to the dominant racial identity of Whites seems problematic, this study revealed negative changes among Arab Muslim Americans following 9/11 including their increased sense of stigmatization, insecurity, and racialization. Furthermore, Marvasti (2005) confirmed the feeling of stigmatization among Middle Eastern Americans and described the strategies that these Middle Eastern Americans utilized to manage their stigmatized

feelings in everyday life. Marvasti (2005) grouped participants into five types of stigma management strategies: humor, education, defiance, cowering, and passing.

Similarly, Muslims are also victims of marginalization and stigmatization in Canada. Statistics Canada (2017) revealed that hate crimes against the Muslim population rose 61% in 2015. In the preceding years between the years of 2010 and 2013, over 47% of recorded hate crimes were against Muslim women who wore the hijab or niqab. These data led Rahmath, Chambers, & Wakewich (2016) to interview 26 Muslim women in Canada to describe their experiences with the hijab, how the hijab is perceived in public, and how experiences with discrimination have motivated Muslim women to reclaim their voices in a space that largely perceives Muslim women to be oppressed. The interviews revealed that all interviewed participants experienced discrimination related to hijab.

2. Experiences of Arab Muslim Students in Western Post-Secondary Institutions

As previous studies have shown the struggles of Arab Muslims as a minority group in the West, this applies to educational institutions. The scholarly literature contains many studies unveiling the challenges that Arab Muslims students face. The focus of the reviewed studies below will be concerned with Arab Muslim experiences within the educational contexts of post-secondary institutions.

The Arab American Institute Survey in 2014, for instance, revealed that Arab and Muslim students faced discrimination by other students, faculty, and/or administrators more than their counterparts of non-Arab and non-Muslim students (Shammas, 2017). When Shammas asked students from 21 American community colleges in focus groups about this survey, students expressed facing religious discrimination on campus more than ethnic discrimination.

Undeniably, the challenges that Muslim students face as a result of their religion intersect with many other factors such as language, family, culture, religion, politics, race, and/or gender. In his dissertation, Majumdar (2008) revealed how the discourses of family, religion, and language are interconnected in challenging and having an impact on the identities of three high school Arab Muslim English language learners. The linguistic and cultural identities of these students are constructed within various social contexts. The study revealed how complex it is for those students to construct their identities not only because of the factors involved in identity construction but also due to the socio-political context after 9/11. In addition, Majumdar (2008) viewed identity from a post-structuralist standpoint which will be discussed in my thesis using Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity.

In his dissertation, Al-Amrani (2011) also examined the social and cultural factors contributing the cultural identity of Arab students at the University of Arkansas. Specifically, he looked at the factors that enhanced or challenged the students' cultural identity formation as well as their learning processes in the classroom. Al-Amrani argued that Arab students represent a complicated and heterogeneous group but tended to categorize Arab students under the two big umbrellas: traditionalists and westernizers. The traditionalists are religiously and culturally conservative group of students who carry their home traditions, habits, and worldview with them. They are usually graduate students and mostly married. While the traditionalists value the traditions, they view the new as "unauthentic, less genuine, strange, threatening, and a deviation" (p. 47). On the contrary, the westernizers are students who try to flee from the restricted social, cultural, and religious traditions of their home cultures. Most of westernizer students are the single younger undergraduates. They like to have many parties and gatherings at their apartments during holidays,

weekends, birthdays, and other occasions. Unlike the traditionalists who are opposed to change, the westernizers are eager to change.

Moreover, Stubbs & Sallee (2013) endeavoured to navigate the “dual identities” of 10 Muslim American university students by describing how these students balance their Muslim values with their responsibilities as university students and how they experience the dual identities of both communities: Muslim and the American. They found that although students expressed that they face some challenges on campus as Muslim students – such as lack of on-campus accommodation for their religious need of designated prayer spaces, conflicts between social expectations and Islamic expectations, and being discriminated against – they did not blame the university’s administrators for the lack of support regarding their issues. Rather, they put such responsibilities on themselves to try to adjust and accommodate to the university’s environment (Stubbs & Sallee, 2013). Indeed, many Muslim students feel torn between the contradictions of the social values of the life of university students and the Islamic values. It is a big challenge that needs to be addressed in the research literature.

3. The Campus

The experiences of university students are typically situated on the campus in which they study, learn, socialize, and sometimes reside. While the Oxford Dictionary defines the campus by its physical aspect as it states, “the grounds and buildings of a university or college,” the campus entails more than the physical space. Beside this static and fixed understanding of space, there is a social understanding of space to be socially (re)constructed and (re)constituted through human practices in their everydayness. This understanding of space is proposed by theorists such as Heidegger and Henri Lefebvre, in particular, whose “spatial triad” will provide a theoretical framework to my thesis that will be applied in my analysis. Some studies looked at the campus

and students' experiences through a spatial lens. I will review those studies below paying careful attention to studies discussing spatial identities of Muslim students.

a. Spaces:

Organizational environments have spaces and systems serving specific goals. The organizational environment affecting students includes classes, student clubs, and university registration processes among many others. Students enter the university and become exposed to many features of university's environment of explicit and implicit rules, behavioural expectations, structures, and goals that have effects on students (Harrington, 2013). Strange and Banning are two prominent scholars who discuss the campus environment and its impact on students. Their book *Design for Learning: Creating Campus Environment for Students Success* (2015) perceives campus design not just to be ivy-covered walls but to contain new designs that facilitate learning and nurture student development. In the fifth chapter of the book entitled *Promoting Inclusion and Safety*, they offer a comprehensive discussion for campuses to provide safe and inclusive environments. Although there was no mention of Muslim students among the examples provided in the book about safe environments for minority communities such as Black students, LGBTQQ students, and female students, the book provides a framework for a safe campus and compels the reader's thinking on the topic. However, the experiences of students are merely subjective and are constructed through social interaction as elucidated by Lefebvre's spatial triad. For example, for an LGBTQQ student, navigating the campus will be different when compared to a Muslim student or an athletic student let alone a student who carries the three identities; a Muslim, an athlete, and one who is questioning his/her gender orientation.

There is a slowly growing body of research on the geography of the university, particularly concerning the spatial impact on Muslim students. Peter Hopkins (2011) perceives university

campuses to be “contested locations in terms of how they shape the production of knowledge, students’ life course trajectories and politics and power relations” (p. 158). In 2006 and early 2007, Hopkins drew on the narratives of 29 Muslim students at a British university about their campus experiences. Although the interviewed students argued that the university campus is tolerant and diverse, they experienced the campus as exclusionary and hostile. Such conflicting comments from students are better understood when situated within the global political context and policies against extremist Muslims practiced in the UK and at the investigated university. Indeed, universities are not just contested places as they produce knowledge; they are contested as part of a contested global realm.

b. Discourses

Nasir & Al-Amin (2006), two Muslim professors in the Northern California context, believe that the “practice of Islam in the college setting is at once intensely personal and painfully public” (p. 22). Drawing on their own personal experiences as Muslim women and their discussions and interviews with Muslim students, they drew attention to the complications that may occur when the campus is not identity-safe and welcoming. Muslim students who do not find support for their religious identity had lowered academic achievement and their sense of well-being was affected. Similarly, Riggers-Piehl & Lehman (2016) shed light on the experiences of religious students (Jews, Christians, and Muslims) across nine of the University of California campuses from a quantitative perspective. Students indicated that their negative campus experiences are influenced by behaviours by their peers, faculty, and staff. Interestingly, Muslim students were the only group linking others’ negative speech and attitudes with a belief about their personal religious practice being disrespected on campus. Hence, Nasir & Al-Amin (2006) called for what they labeled “acts of kindness” such as access to physical space that facilitate Islamic

practices, access to Halal meals, the presence of student communities accepting Muslims, knowledgeable professors about Islam, and supportive Muslim groups on campus.

c. Practices:

The spatial practices for Muslim students would involve how they reuse on-campus spaces to practice their religion or to celebrate their culture. Forming on-campus communities is a common practice among students by joining a student club with which they could identify, whether through shared interests, culture, and/or religion. For the Muslim community, most western universities have a Muslim Student Association (MSA), an association that organizes activities for Muslim students such as prayer times, lectures, discussions, and social events. The MSA is a common association in North American universities and its roots go back to 1963 when the first MSA was established at the campus of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) by international students (The Oxford encyclopedia of Islam and Politics, 2013). Unfortunately, there is a dearth in the literature exploring MSAs and there is a need for more research on MSAs and their role to integrate on-campus diversity.

One interesting study did a linguistic analysis of the Muslim Student Association at Yale University from the years of 2008 to 2014. In this study, Munadar (2015) analyzed MSA in-group e-mail communication and out-group webpage communication to investigate the collective Muslim identity at Yale University. The results showed intensive use of Arabic words in the in-group communication which to Munandar elevated the Islamic and Arabic atmosphere and solidarity among members. Munandar (2015) also observed that the use of Arabic words in combination with English language in out-group communication lessened prejudice within different faith groups by the use of non-prejudicial terms.

In recent studies concerning the exploration of Muslim students' experiences, the MSA comprised a big part of their experiences. Participants interviewed by Dimandja (2017), for example, say that "they view the MSA as a safe place to express their religious identity through prayer. They also view it as a place to connect with other Muslim international students" (p. 22). Moreover, female Muslim students from two public universities in California believe that the MSA provides support for the Muslim community to practice their religion although they find less support from the university in aiding the MSA with administrative issues (Koller, 2015).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

In this thesis, I employ the identity theories of Stuart Hall and Benedict Anderson to better understand the identity construction of Arab Muslim graduate students. I also utilize the spatial triad theory by Henri Lefebvre to better understand how Arab Muslim students (re)construct and (re)constitute the campus through their understanding of their own cultural identities.

As the literature review reveals, there is a growth of scholarly studies investigating the challenges that Muslim students face on-campus and the struggles they face as their Muslim identities evolve let alone their cultural identities. In fact, the Muslim identity is typically integrated within the cultural identity and the two concepts might overlap and can be used interchangeably. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss each of the concepts in the context of this thesis. The theoretical framework will shed light into the concepts of identity, the cultural identity, the Muslim identity, and the spatiality of Muslim identity.

1. Identity

The first question to be asked is: what do we mean by identity?

Stuart Hall (1996a) introduces three perceptions of identity; *a) Enlightenment subject*: where an “individualist” understanding of identity takes place in which the person is self-centred, fixed, autonomous, focusing on her or his capacity of reason, consciousness, and action; *b) sociological subject*: where the person is more aware that identity is constructed in relation to others through the mediation of values, symbols, and meanings, that is culture, in which s/he inhabits; *c) post-modern subject*: where the person has an unstable, fragmented, constantly changing and transforming sense of identity in which it is formed, and transformed through the representation in the cultural system around it.

The concept of “identity” has been explored long before Stuart Hall. In fact, Hall himself (1996b) has drawn, explored, and argued his ideas on identity from the works of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Jacques Derrida. According to Hall (1996b), Foucault for instance, assumes a “radical historicization of the category of the subject” (p. 4) where the subject is formed, as an outcome, “through and within discourses, within specific discursive formations” (p. 10). Discourses have the power to construct subject positions through their rules of construction, and through structured formation of power which is “determined by and constitutive of the power relations that permeate the social realm” (p. 10). Since identities are constructed within discourses, Hall advocates for a broader consideration of identities within the historical and institutional sites within definitive discursive constructions and practices by definitive strategies.

Benedict Anderson (1983), one of the prominent scholars theorizing the construction of collective identity, describes the concept of a “nation” as a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. A “nation” in Anderson’s eyes is an imagined political community that emerges with the rise of secular, capitalist society, and with the advances of technology. According to Anderson (1991), people who live in the

smallest nation may “never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 5). Here, Anderson develops the theory of “Imagined Communities,” an abstract sense of commonality, of membership in a social body where invisible connections take place among its members. Anderson’s understanding of identity is an essentialist view of identity. Hall deconstructs Anderson’s view into a post-modern understanding of identity.

a. The Muslim Identity

Many Muslims define themselves within the boundaries of Islamic practices. There are five pillars of Islam that shape the framework of the Muslim life. These are the testimony of faith, the five prayers every day, giving zakat (giving charity and support to the needy), fasting during the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Makkah once in a lifetime for those who are able. It is recognized that some of the practices of Islam are integrated in the lifestyle or routine of the Muslim’s life. Some are practiced daily such as the five prayers that Muslims pray at certain times during the day while other religious practices are observed annually such as fasting the days during the month of Ramadan and celebrating the two religious holidays that are called Eid. Eid Al-Fitr is the festival for breaking the fast of Ramadan which takes place at the end of Ramadan. Eid Al-Adha is on the 10th day of the Islamic month of the pilgrimage that is called ‘Dhu al-Hijjah’. It marks the date when God commanded Ibrahim to sacrifice his son, Ishmael, to show his devotion.

While these practices are usually integrated into the lifestyles of Muslims, the way in which Muslim individuals perceive these practices, as well as the degree in which they commit to their religious practices, vary from an individual to another. On the one hand, a Muslim, for example, might be strict when it comes to times of performing the five prayers. When the time of one of the prayers arrives, he/she would take a break from what he/she is doing and would go find a place to

pray. On the other hand, there are individuals who would delay performing their prayers until they go home while there are other Muslims who would not really commit to the five prayers or would fluctuate in their commitment. Therefore, it must be recognized that the issue of Muslim student challenges on-campus is more complicated than it might look. My story in the introduction of the thesis is one example of how Muslims might evolve in their religious practices and their understanding of their religious (Muslim) identity. This study recognizes that although the challenges of Muslim students might be collectively understood, the experiences are more individualistic and unique.

Some scholars argue that religious identity is an educational issue that needs to be theoretically addressed (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010) and (Kazanjian & Laurence, 2007). In their study, Cole & Ahmadi (2010) surveyed 203 college students from various US higher education institutions of which 70 were Christian, 67 were Jewish, and 66 were Muslim students. They revealed that “Muslim students are an integral part of the campus community and embracing their presence can lead to diversity-enriched campus environments” (p. 136). They argued that not only Muslim students contribute to campus diversity through their presence, but also through their interaction with ethnically and religiously different peers and vice-versa.

b. The Cultural Identity

Constructing “cultural identity” according to Stuart Hall (1996b) would take two approaches:

a. A naturalistic traditional approach where identity is produced intrinsically and is defined by the common characteristics or common experiences or both in which the dilemma of representation of one identity would arise in attempting to find one fully established, authentic, and identical unity of identity (Hall, 1996b),

b. A discursive post-structuralist approach where it is an ongoing process, and unfinished where representation of identity would lie in the multiplicity of identities rather than in a singular identity which emerges within the play of power and is constructed through the other, through difference, through instability and insecurity, through exclusion (Hall, 1996b).

Hall (1996b) believes that the discursive process of identity construction relies on resources of history, language, and culture. Hence, it is a “process of becoming rather than being” (p. 3), and a process of who we might become rather than “who we are” (P. 3).

Many scholars have identified cultural identity by the intersection and interconnectedness of religion, culture, ethnicity, class, and national identities (Dey, 2012).

c. Spatiality of the Muslim Identity

In his book *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1999) conceptualizes space to entail three interconnected aspects: representational space (spaces), representations of space (discourses), and spatial practice (practices).

Firstly, for representational space (spaces: the physical environment), it “embody[ies] complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art” (Lefebvre, 1999, P. 33). Secondly, representations of space “are tied to the relations of production and to the ‘order’ which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations” (Lefebvre, 1999, P. 33). Thirdly, for spatial practice, Lefebvre (1999) explains that it “embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation” (p. 33).

Lefebvre’s spatial triad provides a framework to my thesis that will be applied in my analysis. First, representational space for Arab Muslim students are represented in cultural

symbolism such as a Mosque or a cultural center. Second, representations of space (discourses) imply a question of how Arab Muslim students experience the campus, and “may be imaginatively constructed or produced” (Fridolfsson & Elander, 2013, P. 324). Third, spatial practices (practices) for Muslim students might involve how they reuse on-campus spaces to practice their religion or celebrate their culture. It should be noted that those three dimensions of space are theoretically distinguishable. However, they coexist, intertwine and overlap in real life (Fridolfsson & Elander, 2013).

Furthermore, Staeheli & Mitchell (2009) add a new layer to the conception of space and argue that there is “mobile sense of place” (p. 190). As international students move, they carry various values, expectations, and ways of understanding the world brought from their homes. However, the mobilization of students may bring change with their understandings and values.

2.3 Chapter Conclusion

The literature review on the experiences of Arab Muslim students in Western post-secondary institutions suggests that this group struggles to fully experience its cultural and/or religious identity on-campus. Despite the existence of numerous studies on the discriminative challenges that Arab Muslim students face on-campus, most of these studies are situated on American campuses. Therefore, it is important to critically examine the unique cultural and religious experiences of Arab Muslim students within the Canadian higher education institutions.

Furthermore, although studies have highlighted the racial, religious, cultural and gendered experiences of Arab Muslim students, few studies provided a spatial perspective into the experiences on identity construction of Arab Muslim students. By framing a spatial triad of

(spaces, discourses, and practices) within the identity construction theory, an attempt is made to explore the ways that Arab Muslim graduate students experience their cultural and religious identity in the university of British Columbia. Adding a spatial lens to identity construction studies is especially important because schools are critical sites in producing cultural meanings and have provided critical spaces in fighting as well as producing discriminations (Inwood & Martin, 2008). Understanding the experiences of Arab Muslim students within this spatial framework may also help to elicit detailed understandings of the challenges, the needs, and the expectations of Arab Muslim graduate students at the university of British Columbia.

Chapter 3: Research Design

By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.

Confucius

3.1 Methodological Approach: Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a qualitative approach that aims to understand the hidden meanings and the essence of lived experiences of individuals. Grbich (2013) explains that essences are “objects that do not necessarily exist in time and space like facts do but can be known through essential or imaginative intuition involving interaction between researcher and respondents or between researcher and texts” (p. 92). Phenomenology is best used to explore, describe, express, and interpret the rich detail of the essence of individuals’ experiences of a phenomenon (Grbich, 2013). In fact, the focus of the phenomenological research is not on objective reality, but rather on a person’s understanding of his/her own experience and its meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is a good approach to provide detailed descriptions of participants’ changes in feelings and experiences over time (Grbich, 2013). Therefore, this research sought to understand and describe how Arab Muslim Graduate students describe their religious and cultural identities and how these students experience their religious and cultural identity construction within the context of the university, thereby focusing on the essence of their experiences.

3.2 Positionality of the researcher

In my research, I aim to understand a group to which I belong to and in which I can be identified. In his book *Cultural Identity*, Hall (1996b) refers to the typical understanding of identification as realizing “some shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity or allegiance established in this foundation” (p. 2). Identifying the target group for my research took me a lot of time to think through. Whereas I am attempting to explore “cultural identity” of a group of people, the act of identifying and labelling

per se presents a hard task for me. Who do I want to include and who do I want to exclude? On what basis do I decide, choose, and identify?

I am an Arab, a Muslim, a Saudi, a hijab wearing woman, a graduate international student, and a mom. There are many umbrellas to stand under. Whereas targeting Saudi students, or students from the Gulf, would be based on a set of common characteristics of economic and cultural backgrounds that are similar, these students usually do not face major financial and immigration issues as other Muslim or Arab students in Canada. Therefore, I do not find the strongest fit with that group. I am currently studying on my own expenses, and identification with this group (Saudis) will wrongly assume sharing common characteristics of Saudi students of being financially more stable.

Nevertheless, the umbrellas of “Islam” and “Arab” seem to bridge the gap of sameness yet brings connections among their members that transcend geopolitical boundaries to reach to Anderson’s imagined communities. On the one hand, Muslims, a large diverse group, have this bond that goes beyond all political, cultural, linguistic barriers: the religious bond of “Islam.” On the other hand, Arabs, despite their national differences, share the geography, the language, the culture, and share a sense of unity in the minds of its people that bonds their mixture together, a sense of “Arabism”. I should mention here that not every Muslim is Arab and vice versa.

Therefore, I choose to stand under the two big umbrellas of Islam and Arabism. Although one is based on religion and the other on culture, being Muslim and Arab is my cultural identity. This cultural identity creates a unique experience that transcends the artificial political, economic, and cultural differences to form a community know as Arabs.

As a researcher conducting qualitative research about a group of people, sharing their location or their “social identity” will allow me to stand on the same epistemological land, and thus have a possibly truthful interpretation of them (Alcoff, 1991). It is important to point out that my attempts towards sharing the cultural identity of my participants does not authorize me to speak for them. It only enables me to have a better understanding of their experiences. Thus, I deliver their voices in their own descriptive words of their own experiences.

I entered this study with some biases and assumptions about the construction of cultural identities of Arab Muslim graduate students derived from my own experience in the university. I believed that most Arab Muslim graduate students face similar fears, doubts, and a sense of discrimination similar to mine. However, I was able to set aside my biases through the process of bracketing. Bracketing is “a methodological device of phenomenological inquiry that requires deliberate putting aside one’s own belief about the phenomenon under investigation or what one already knows about the subject prior to and throughout the phenomenological investigation” (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013, P. 1). Bracketing is a methodological tool to demonstrate validity in phenomenological research. More details on bracketing will be demonstrated in my validity section below.

3.3 Positionality of the participants

The Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE, 2015) defines international students nationally (by their nations) and in broader sense geographically. It indicates that the Middle East and North Africa’s countries (MENA) comprise 10% of international students studying in Canada, at both K-12 and post secondary education, with Saudi Arabia alone

comprising 4.85%. MENA is one way of representing the Arabian countries. However, this geographical perspective would involve other non-Arab nationalities such as Iran, Malta, and Israel that brings other cultures, languages, and political issues than those with which people from Arabian countries identify.

Mazawi & Sultana (2010) argue that naming is an act of construction, an act of taking control over a space, sculpting it, labelling it, and positioning it under specific political, economic, and cultural conditions that defines its position within the larger global world. They bring attention to how terms like “Orient,” “Middle East,” “MENA,” and “Mediterranean” would indicate a “Western” expression that does not necessarily make sense to the Arabian recipient. Indeed, scholars like Hilal & Denman (2013), and Davison (1960) mention that the term “Middle East” originated with an American naval officer named “Alfred Thayer Mahan” in 1902, and refers to the possibility that it might also have been used by the British Foreign Office to distinguish among parts of its colonial authority. They interestingly bring attention to “how simple geographic names are enmeshed in geopolitics and can shift in meaning over time” (Hilal & Denman, 2013, p.31). Therefore, such labelling as MENA will not be used for this study to identify the participants.

Culturally speaking, an Arab is one who comes from an Arabian country, speaks Arabic, and is mostly assumed to be a Muslim. It could be that the sense of Arabism, the sense that is felt among Arabs meeting on non-Arab grounds is what make terms like “the Arab World,” in Arabic (al-alam al-arabi) as Mazawi & Sultana (2010) indicated, more representative to an Arab than the former mentioned Western expressions. Hence, this study targets participants who are Arab Muslim Graduate students at the University of British Columbia.

3.4 Sampling

I aimed to recruit 10 Arab Muslim graduate students at the Master's or PhD program at UBC. I looked for equal numbers of male and female participants to have a good understanding of their experience of both women and men. I designed a recruitment poster (see [Appendix A](#)) and sent it by two means: 1. Emails to Arab Muslim on-campus email groups comprised of male and female students, 2. A smart phone application called WhatsApp that has a female group for the Arab Muslim on-campus community. I used these two tools for recruitment because these are the two means of communication commonly used by Arab Muslim Graduate students at UBC especially for the on-campus community of which I am a member.

Recruiting female students was easier than males. This is because my cultural identity played a role in the recruitment process. My Arab and Muslim circle of friends and acquaintance is restricted to females due to the gender segregated culture I come from that resulted in my preference and comfort to be female-restricted. Therefore, I asked my husband, a UBC PhD student at the time, to help spread my recruitment poster to his male Arab Muslim acquaintances and friends.

Eventually, 10 Arabs Muslim graduate students were recruited (5 females and 5 males). A profile of participants is illustrated in Table 1. Pseudonyms were used to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Moreover, based on the requests of some participants, there is no identification of the program of study because some programs have small number of students and participants will be easily identified. Rather, the name of the faculty is used.

Participants were from six different Arab nationalities: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq. Due to reasons of confidentiality, I have not identified my participants by country of origin. I avoided recruiting participants in their first year of graduate study because

time is an important factor to allow understanding, reflecting, and/or changing to take place on their experiences. Participants were both Master's and PhD students at UBC whose years of graduate study varied from 2nd year to 6th year. Most participants had spent some years in Canada before they commenced their graduate programs. Three students came as immigrants. The other seven students came as international students. Two of the international students gained the Primary Residents (PR) sometimes during their stay in Canada. I acknowledge that immigrants and international students are two distinct groups and I have no intention to conflate the two.

Table 1.

Profile of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender/ Hijab	Graduate Program	Faculty	Year of Study	Place of Residence	Years lived in Canada
Sara	Female/yes	PhD	Engineering	6 th	On-campus (Family housing)	12
Hadeel	Female/yes	PhD	Land and Food Systems	3 rd	On-campus (Family housing)	7
Jabir	Male	PhD	Engineering	4 th	On-campus (Students Dorm)	3, 1/2
Ola	Female/No	Masters	Land and Food Systems	3 rd	Off-campus	2, 1/2
Nadine	Female/yes	PhD	Education	4 th	On-campus (Family housing)	8, 1/2
Ayesha	Female/yes	PhD	Education	4 th	On-campus	10

(Family housing)						
Omar	Male	PhD	Engineering	2nd	On-campus	8
(Students Dorm)						
Tariq	Male	PhD	Engineering	6 th	On-campus	7
(Family housing)						
Ahmed	Male	Masters	Engineering	4 th	Off-campus	11
Sami	Male	PhD	Dentistry	2 nd	On-campus	2, 1/2
(Family housing)						

Sara is a PhD student in her 6th year in the Faculty of engineering. Sara is 39-year-old wife and mother of a daughter. She has been living in Canada for 12 years. She is a conservative Muslim woman, and this shows in the way she dresses. She wears head scarf and avoids wearing tight cloths like pants, but wears long skirts, and avoid wearing make up. I know Sara as a neighbor and as a part of the Arab Muslim graduate students' community. She lives on-campus with her husband and elementary school daughter. Sara is an active person who is interested in Muslim issues and volunteers through Muslim Association in Canada (MAC).

Hadeel is a PhD student in her 3rd year of study in the Faculty of Land and Food Systems. She and her husband came to Canada to pursue their graduate studies. Hadeel is 29 years old and she is a mother of two kids. She lives in family housing on-campus. Moving to Canada 7 years ago was a big change for her because it was her first experience living in a Western country. She wears the hijab. She used to wear an Abaya (a long loose robe over clothes) and a headscarf

covering the hair when she first arrived, but later she switched to long shirts and pants and maintained her hijab.

Jabir is a PhD student in his fourth year. He did his undergraduate degree and Master's degree in ~~Egypt~~. He is 28 years old and lives on-campus in the student dorms. Jabir is a conservative Muslim man and he describe himself as such. His small growing beard is a physical indication of being a conservative Muslim.

Ola is a 27 years old student doing her Master's study in the Faculty of Land and Food System. She came to Canada three years ago and she is currently in her third year of study. Ola does not wear a headscarf and says that her decision to take off her hijab was made long before coming to Canada. Interestingly, Ola was the only participant who preferred that her interview be conducted in the Arabic language. Ola is divorced and although her brother lives on-campus with his family, Ola preferred to live off-campus by herself. She used to live in the dorms, and her experience living with other girls introduced her to the Western lifestyle of university students.

Nadine is a 32 years old PhD student. She had recently defended her PhD after 4 years of PhD study in the Faculty of Education. She has been in Canada for about 8 years and a half earning her Master's and PhD degrees. Nadine grew up in the US, moved to her Arab country and lived there for about 12 years, and then moved to Canada. She is a mother of a 6 years old son. She lives in the family housing on-campus and her husband comes frequently for visits. Nadine wears a headscarf.

Ayesha is PhD student in the faculty of Education in her 4th year. She is a wife and a mother of two Canadian teenagers. ~~She is from Tunisia.~~ Ayesha came to Canada ten years ago with her family as immigrants. Her kids have ~~Tunisian passports but never lived in Tunisia~~ and lived in a

Gulf country but have never had the Gulf country's passport. Therefore, they decided to immigrate to Canada for the sake of the kids to belong somewhere and have a place to call home. Ayesha lives in the family housing on-campus with her two kids and visiting husband. She loves living there.

Omar is a 26 years old PhD student. He is in his second year of study. He has been living in Canada for seven years doing undergraduate study, Master's, and PhD. He lived off-campus by himself but moved on-campus recently when he got married. Omar has an obviously long beard.

Tariq is PhD student in his 6th year at the Faculty of Engineering. Tariq is 31 years old. He came to Canada seven years ago to do his Master's and PhD studies. Moving to Canada was the first experience for Tariq to travel and live abroad.

Ahmed is a 4th year PhD student in the Faculty of Engineering. Ahmed arrived in Canada more than 12 years ago with his family. They chose to live in Vancouver because of the good reputation the UBC had nationally and internationally. He did his undergraduate studies and proceeded to the Master's and then the PhD. Ahmed is 29 years old. He lives off-campus with his family because he finds it less costly.

Sami is a PhD student in his 2nd year at the Faculty of Dentistry. Sami is 35 years old. He did his Master's degree in the US where he lived for five years, went back to his home country for one year to practice dentistry, then moved to Canada two years ago with his wife and three kids to do his PhD. Sami lives on-campus in the family housing and thinks it is a positive experience.

3.5 Research Site

Participants were invited to the place of their preference on-campus for coffee or lunch while conducting the interview. It was important for me to locate the interviews on-campus as the discussion on students' experiences of the campus's space was part of the study. The interview sites play an important role in qualitative research as they would embody and create various meanings and social relations (Inwood & Martin, 2008). Conducting the interview on-campus would also give the participant the feel of the place, the feel of being a student, and may recall past experiences and stories of the place from the participant's memory.

Due to my cultural assumptions, going to a restaurant or a café with a man was not very comfortable for me. I bracketed out my embodied cultural assumptions, and let the participants choose where they would prefer to be interviewed, at a café or a restaurant. Interestingly, some male participants expressed feeling uncomfortable with meeting in a café or a restaurant with me as I am a Muslim Arab female interviewer. The first male participant I interviewed asked for "somewhere more formal (Jabir)," so we met at a public study area. Eventually, I tended to choose the location of the interview to be a public area to ensuring a comfortable environment for both of us. Moustakas (1994) asserts that it is the responsibility of the interviewer to create a comfortable climate that allows the participant to respond honestly and comprehensively.

3.6 Data Collection

For phenomenological research, data are typically collected through long, informal, interactive interviews involving open-ended questions and comments. It is especially important to the phenomenological research to set aside "prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about

things” (p. 578). The phenomenological researcher needs to “ ‘invalidate,’ ‘inhibit, and ‘disqualify’ all commitments with reference to previous knowledge and experience” (p. 578) in a process known as bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). In other word, the researcher needs to clear ordinary thoughts about the world and to gaze upon a phenomenon in a naive and fresh look.

In alignment with phenomenological study, one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were employed to collect information to understand the essence of international Muslim students’ experiences of the phenomena under consideration. The semi-structured manner of interviewing is important to follow the participant’s lead and follow up in response to the participant’s narration. It is equally important to return several times to seek clarification of issues raised by participants (Gribch, 2013).

Participants were invited to one session of an interview of approximately one-hour long. Participants were informed that there might be a need for a follow-up meeting and this could be arranged later. However, no extra meetings were needed. One day prior the interview, each participant received the consent form (see [Appendix B](#)) along with the interview question in Arabic and in English (see [Appendix C](#)). Interviews took the period of March to June 2017.

3.7 Reflections on the medium of communication

A major issue that I faced in conducting the interviews was the fact that English is an additional language for me as a researcher and interviewer and likely for most of the participants. Here, I explore this communication dilemma for my study.

I learned English in school courses since kindergarten. My English proficiency, however, was beginner-intermediate when I graduated from high school as English is not commonly used

within Saudi communities. I majored in English during my undergraduate studies in Saudi Arabia and after graduation I lived in Australia for three years and did a Master's degree there. I moved to Canada in 2012. As I might be considered an advanced English language user currently being at a graduate level, I personally do not see it this way. I am still acquiring new words every other day mainly through readings, struggling sometimes to find the appropriate word I need to use, and thinking sometimes in Arabic while speaking English. Therefore, there may be a dual language issue in my research for me and for my participants.

Like me, one might assume that my participants would most probably be excellent English language users as they are graduate students at their Master's and PhD levels. While using proper English for speaking and even for discussing ideas and concepts critically would be axiomatic, the fact that English is the second language for me and my participants raises many issues and questions for the study. What influences would both Arabic and English impose in the context of the interview? Would the participants discuss their cultural identities similarly in both languages? Would not English be a colonial form that may restrict freedom of expression especially when discussing one's cultural identity?

Many complications may arise throughout the interview process. Such complications include the following: the choice of the language of the interview between Arabic and English, whether to involve the participants in decision making of language preference, how translation (if in Arabic) would be presented, how participants would be represented, and the complications that would arise through the act of translation. In an attempt to engage such questions in my research, here I delve into some of the scholarly literature to extrapolate insights on questions of language, identity, and translation.

In my study, I follow Hall's postmodernist approach to negotiate cultural identities. Hall (1996) asserts that discourses hold the power to shape the subject, to construct subject positions through their rules of construction and through structured formation of power. As identities are constructed within discourses, the issue of language transfer (translation) would play a critical role in the authenticity of participants in negotiating their identities. The poet, Nancy Prasad, refers beautifully about this dilemma for the second language user who must use it as "a stranger voice," in her poem *You Have Two Voices*;

But then you take a stranger's voice
When you speak in your new tongue
Each word is a stone dropped in a pool
I watch the ripples and wait for more
You search in vain for other stones to throw
They are heavy, your hands hang down

As a speaker of English as a second language myself, I repeatedly face such difficulty in selecting the proper word to express my thoughts as well as feelings. As an insider to my study group, I am more convinced of the significance of conducting the interviews in our mother tongue, Arabic. However, how would I face the nuances and transfer them justly into English (the language required to be used for this thesis at UBC)?

Indeed, this is a complex question to be answered. It is argued that there is hardly a single correct translation to a text, as meaning is constructed through intersecting discourses, practices, positions (Temple & Young, 2004), and the limits and possibilities of a given language. This post-structural approach to translation complicates the matter more but complements the

phenomenological approach of this study. As translation is a limited meaning-making tool, investigating cultural identity formation is restricted within historical, social, and political boundaries of discourses and practices. Phenomenological studies are always aware of the subjectivities surrounding the research in relation to its methods, participants, and the researcher's reflexivity (Roulston, 2010).

Furthermore, one of the difficulties that may arise would be facing a contradiction between an important meaning and a desire for the researcher or the translator to obtain conceptual equivalence, that is, having the same meaning and relevance in two different cultures. Regmi, Naidoo, and Pilkington (2010) advise having a discussion among the research team to arrive at the closest meaning. Understanding the linguistic and social context is vital when translating. I think being an insider to my research group may assist my interpretation of participants.

Regmi et al. (2010) suggest two strategies for translation in qualitative research for interviews conducted in an original source language as follows:

1. *Word for word (verbatim) transcribing*: this includes pauses, emotional expressions, and annotations in the same language. Each transcript should then be translated into the target language (English). It is important to check and recheck transcripts against the translated interpretations during analysis and synthesis to add credibility to research findings.
2. *Key themes transcribing*: this includes only the key themes or issues that emerge in the process of translation.

Regmi et al. (2010) argue that while the first approach maintains rigor and gives credibility to the research, it is time consuming to transcribe and translate every word as opposed to the second

approach where it saves time but entails less transcribing, which leads to possible mistakes and losing important meanings.

In a phenomenological study, participants are co-researchers. Hence, I provided my participants with the choice of their preferred language of communication. An Arabic and an English version (see [Appendix C](#)) of the interview questions was prepared for the participants. None of my participants had a strong language preference, so the interviews were conducted in English except for one participant, Ola, who preferred Arabic. Another participant, Hadeel, decided to shift her talk into Arabic in the middle of the interview because someone came to sit at the table next to ours and she felt it is a sensitive topic that need not be heard by others.

For translating Arabic text into English, the second approach of translating key themes was followed because the meaning was preserved through the field-notes and the recordings. In addition, peer-checking of translation was applied because my participants were co-researchers; hence, they were active contributors to the research. Furthermore, they were graduate students, checking with them (member-check) served the study as well as it served the participants in giving them voice. They were reliable sources to check translation as well as the analysis and presentation of their quotes and their meanings.

3.8 Data Analysis

The aim of phenomenological data analysis is a deep understanding of the meaning through description (Waters, 2017) which allows for the uncovering of the essence of the phenomena (Grbich, 2014). The researcher's "social locations and cultural influences" (p. 96) contribute to the uncovering of interpretation of the text (Grbich, 2014). To get to the description of the essence of the phenomena, a phenomenological analysis process is required. This process includes identifying

the major themes from the participants' transcripts using thematic analysis and questioning the data and any emerging assumptions so that new descriptions and new concepts may emerge (Grbich, 2014).

For my study, I wrote field notes following each interview. The field notes are descriptions that I wrote to myself that mainly aimed to capture the atmosphere of the interview including the following: the settings, the process of explaining and signing the consent form, the process of asking about the language preference of the interview, and the nature of the rapport between me and each participant. I also used the field notes to outline the main points of each interview, write about what resonated with me as a potential quote, write about some challenges during the interview, and write about possible unprepared questions that may have arisen during or after each interview. Then, recorded interviews were transcribed. Following this, the entire interview transcript was read to obtain a sense of the whole data. I then highlighted and elicited potential themes and quotes for each transcript.

3.9 Validity

Two main means have been used in this research to ensure validity. These are bracketing and member-checking.

1. Bracketing

In phenomenology, bracketing is a means of demonstrating the validity of the data collection and analysis process in which the researcher makes efforts to put aside her/his knowledge, beliefs, values and experiences to reach to an accurate description of participants' lived experiences (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). However, Chan et al. argue that it is rarely that the

practice of using bracketing is demonstrated explicitly. Hence, they suggested strategies addressing the issue of bracketing that include the following:

1. Mental preparation: before conducting the interview, I ask myself: “Am I humble enough to learn about the experiences of other Arab Muslim Graduate students including those who have different thoughts than mine?” and I also ask: “Can I equip myself to adopt an attitude of conscious ignorance about the issue under investigation?” (p. 4). Before each interview, I was curious and ready to listen to the differences in the experiences of Arab Muslim graduate students.

2. Deciding the scope of the literature review: the knowledge acquired through the process of literature review may unavoidably affect the researcher’s preconceptions on the topic under study and hence affect the dynamic of the interviews and data analysis. Chan et al. advise delaying the literature review until after data collection and analysis so that the researcher does not prepare questions or analyze data for themes that they know exist in the literature. Practically speaking, this is hard to achieve and controversial issue in the literature of research methods. However, I was fortunate in having done the interviews before conducting the literature review. This has impacted me positively in wholly listening to the participants without having a specific analysis in mind.

3. Planning the data collection: in phenomenological research, the interview questions are semi-structured so that the researcher can follow the cues of the participants. It is important that the researcher bracket out presuppositions when starting the interview and maintain his/her curiosity regarding what she/he might not know so that participants can express themselves freely. In interviewing my participants, I followed up with the stories they told me and did not feel obliged to not following up participants’ narratives.

4. Planning data analysis: because data analysis is performed by the researcher, “efforts should be made by researchers to put aside their repertoires of knowledge, beliefs, values and experiences in order to accurately describe participants’ life experiences” (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013, p. 2). After acknowledging that my own interpretations might influence the data analysis, enhancing the trustworthiness of the data analysis is needed. This is done through member-checking.

2. Member-check

When all themes and quotes are identified, I referred back to each participant for a member-check to make sure that my interpretations of the themes and their quotes were accurate. Because my participants are graduate students, checking my thematic analysis with them serves to maximize the validity of the research and ensure that the experiences of participants were correctly interpreted.

3.10 Chapter Conclusion

Phenomenology was the method of inquiry I employed in this qualitative research. The positionality of both myself and the participants was identified. The sample size included 10 Arab Muslim graduate students at the university of British Columbia. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. All interviews took place on-campus. An attempt was made to reflect of the language used in the interviews. Finally, the phenomenological data analysis strategies, including bracketing and member-check were employed.

Chapter 4: Findings

Identity is formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways in which we are represented or addressed in cultural systems which surround us.

Stuart Hall

4.1 Chapter Introduction

To delve into the experiences of Arab Muslim graduate students in the university, I asked participants questions on their experiences of being Arab, being Muslim, and being graduate students at UBC. The questions include asking about their sense of belonging, their sense of understanding themselves as Arabs and as Muslims, and their experiences of the campus.

Interviews with 10 (five women and five men) Arab Muslim graduate students were conducted to understand their lived experiences in attempt to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the individual perceptions of Arab Muslim graduate students on the construction of their cultural and religious identity within UBC?

RQ2. How do Arab Muslim graduate students perceive the university's spaces, discourses, and practices in (de)constructing their cultural and religious identity?

In addition, the research questions included 4 sub-questions that are the following:

1. What kinds of experiences do Arab Muslim graduate students have that may relate to their sense of cultural and religious identity?
2. How do these experiences change the way these students perceive their cultural and religious identity?
3. To which extent do Arab Muslim graduate students attribute changes to their cultural and religious identity to the university?
4. In which ways do the university's spaces, discourses, and practices arise in students' narratives?

In this chapter, I discuss findings that provide a fresh viewpoint on issues related to the way higher education institutions might view the cultural and religious experiences of Arab

Muslim graduate students. The findings of this study reflect participants' perceptions on the construction of their cultural and religious identity within the university and reflect the way they perceive the role of the university in contributing to their cultural identity construction.

Themes were determined by using significant verbatim quotes from individuals and phenomenology was utilized to understand the essence of Arab Muslim Graduate students' experiences. Throughout the analysis, six main findings emerged that are related to the research questions. The first five themes related to the first main research question. The sixth theme responded to the second main research question. Themes are as follows:

1. Academic challenges in adapting to the Canadian learning environment.
2. The influence of the visible Muslim identity on students' experiences.
3. The influence of family on the academic experience.
4. Perceptions of cultural identity and the integration of religion, culture, and nationality.
5. Constructing and reconstructing the Muslim identity.
6. The campus reflecting religious and cultural experiences of students:
 - a. Spaces:
 - i. A need for religious integration on-campus.
 - ii. A need for cultural integration on-campus.
 - iii. The experience of on-campus housing.
 - b. Discourses:
 - i. A sense of empowerment.
 - ii. The influence of the disciplines on student's experiencing their cultural identities.
 - c. Practices.

4.2 Academic challenges in adapting to the Canadian learning environment

Some participants expressed facing difficulties when they first started their studies. Difficulties arose mainly from two feelings: feeling overwhelmed by the different study environment from what they previously experienced and feeling different than other students resulting in having low confidence about their academic skills and hence underestimating their academic abilities.

Nadine, for example, described her feeling of not fitting in when she first joined graduate school and being overwhelmed. She said:

Honestly, I didn't feel that I belonged. They [other students] were fast paced. They were very critical. They were very well spoken. And I did not feel that I was like that.

Hadeel also went through a similar experience. She felt different than other students and was used to having a very formal relationship with her colleagues at the beginning of her study as she described:

I felt like starting a grad school as an ESL student I found it more time consuming to catch up in my classes. I remember in all my classes I was the only one who was wearing hijab, so I kind of felt different. But I wouldn't have these feelings now. I don't know why.

Hadeel asserted that her academic challenges in the beginning were only her own thoughts about herself as she elucidated:

I think because I assumed that, oh, they would look at me differently, and... I think part of it also is the level of knowledge. I felt, oh, I am coming from a different background, I learned differently, I have no background in this and this, I focus on these weaknesses and I feel I have to work harder to reach this level of education, and then I realized no! we are all kind of the same, I just put these assumptions on me.

In addition, Ayesha had some issues during her first two years of study in terms of having different research interests than her supervisor. She found it very hard to ask to change her supervisor to a better match. She said:

At that time, I was not aware of my rights as a student.

Ayesha justified this statement:

In our countries, generally speaking, especially Arab and Muslim countries, we don't object... We don't say no! As women, when we are at schools we are educated that whatever that teacher says you need to accept.

Things changed for Ayesha as she gained confidence in her rights as a student and felt empowered through understanding the system, achieving A+ marks and earning awards and scholarships, and most interestingly from changes in her identity towards becoming a Canadian and not an international student. Ayesha said:

So, it became a different thing like how you see yourself. I am not an international student. I am a Canadian, and I have the right to be treated the right way. So, it is a matter of maturity and how we see thinking of this as place where I should belong.

Furthermore, Tariq faced some academic challenges that were mainly caused by his linguistic abilities. He came to Canada without having formal study of English. The means of study at university in his country was English but his professors tended to use Arabic in instruction and English in the writing of the lectures and exams. Tariq completed a TOFEL test and had a good mark that qualified him for entry to UBC. While he had very good understanding of the English writing and reading, Tariq faced some difficulties understanding spoken English which affected him. As he explained:

I wasn't able to understand what the professor is saying, especially two of them. Two courses I was taking the first year I came, both of them weren't actually like... their mother tongue wasn't English... So, it was even more difficult for me to understand. I kind of lost my self-confidence in the first few months here.

Things quickly changed for Tariq to the good as he declared:

But once I start to get good scores in the courses although I was just studying by myself [and] I wasn't able to understand anything from professors, I kind of recovered that self-confidence and things improved.

This study reveals that Arab Muslim Graduate students faced academic challenges at the start of their studies that originated from the linguistic abilities for some students, being overwhelmed by the different learning environment, and having internal thoughts and opinions about themselves as being different and hence belittling their academic abilities. The interviews also showed that these students gained confidence about their academic abilities through achieving good marks and through feeling empowered as students.

4.3 The influence of the visible Muslim identity on students' experiences

All but one female participant wears a hijab. The hijab is a visible symbol revealing the religious identity of a woman. A less visible indication of the Muslim identity for male students would be having certain Islamic names like Mohammad and Ahmad, sporting a beard, or wearing cultural clothing such as thobe – a long dress that Muslim males traditionally wear. Other less visible signs would be religious practices in public such as praying, abstaining from alcohol drinking and fasting in the Islamic month of Ramadan.

Interviews with participants revealed that some students were very sensitive to the stereotypical negative image of Muslims and felt victimized. Indeed, all female participants received discriminating comments sometime during their stay in Canada, regardless of the way they dressed. For example, Ola did not wear the hijab and thus her Muslim identity was not openly revealed. However, she said that whenever she told others that she is an Arab, she found people react in a negative unwelcoming way. Ola recalled:

At first, I wanted to have non-Arab friends so that I can practice speaking English, but I found it really difficult and unacceptable. They don't want to be friends with me because I am an Arab. So, I ended up making Arab friends because I don't want to be without friends. So even friends-wise I never felt acceptable.

In contrast to Ola, Sara dresses as a conservative Muslim by wearing the hijab and not tight clothes. Sara also felt her difference among other students in classes. Sara said:

When I attend classes, I notice that all the chairs filled first before the chair beside me.

Sara explained:

Because you look different, maybe people are not sure if they can talk to you or not, are you OK? Just because you look different.

For male students, they expressed fewer distressing experiences than females regarding their physical appearance. One example regarding how looks can signify religious identity for men is growing their beards. Growing a beard is usually a sign of asceticism and can be an indication of being part of an Islamic group that has political stance. Omar whose real name is a common name among Muslims and who also sports a beard commented:

It's easier here to do whatever you want than back home. Just a funny example, when I grow my beard no one cares. Back home people are like: why do you do this?

Moreover, I asked two male participants whose names clearly reveal their Muslim identities if they have ever faced a bad experience because people knew they were Muslims from their names. They both denied facing discrimination from that. Interestingly, the study showed that women felt and/or faced discrimination based on the physical revealing traits of their religious identity indicating that they are Muslims while men did not.

Furthermore, the sociopolitical events and decisions following Trump's presidency attributed to raise the fear and self-consciousness among Muslim students regarding their visibility as Muslim students on Western campuses. One female participant, Ayesha, disclosed to me that

she was thinking at certain times to remove her hijab to protect herself from experiencing aggression. Ayesha justified that there is a rule in Islam that says: *Necessities permits prohibitions*, meaning that as long as she feels unsafe and targeted as a Muslim who is wearing the hijab, she can remove it. Such justification indicates that it is somehow against her wish of how she wants to be visible. Perhaps, after all, it is a problem about visibility as Ayesha put it:

If you are not wearing this (pointing to the hijab), nobody will recognize who you are or what you are, or what origin you are...even on-campus. It is the name, it is the cultural origin, but mostly it is the visibility.

However, although Ayesha is aware of the hidden racism against Muslims and she works on these issues through her study, she feels she is happy and blessed to be a Canadian citizen.

Furthermore, I personally have similar fears to Ayesha. Last year, I applied for a panel presentation with my colleagues for a North American education conference that took place in the US. We were accepted. However, right after President Trump issued the travel ban for seven Muslim countries, I panicked. I felt insecure as I always do when I travel to the US. I was afraid although I was not from the seven banned countries. Eventually, I decided to withdraw. Just being visibly identified as a Muslim is a trigger for my fears. These were feelings I experienced as an Arab Muslim graduate student that I know many other students share. No doubt that the political events contributed to raise Islamophobia that impacts Muslims as much as it impacts non-Muslims in the West. In some cases, it impacted the religious identity among Muslim students.

4.4 The influence of family on the academic experience

Seven of the interviewed students live with their families while three students live by themselves. Of the seven students living with their families, four female participants are married

and have kids, one male is recently married with no kids, and one male student is married and have kids. Ayesha, Sara, Nadine and Hadeel are mothers whose children live on-campus with them. They all expressed that they do not very often commit to the outings that their colleagues have on weekends because they put their families first. Sara disclosed that having familial commitments took her away from her study. She jokingly said:

So, you put your family first, you stay longer in the grad school.

Two participants, Hadeel and Ayesha, thought that having a family is a positive thing as they gave them a break from the academic life, allowed them to live in family housing which is a family-friendly community and made them be offered reasonable prices for houses in comparison to housing in the campus area.

Ayesha admitted that it is hard to balance family and school, but she tried her best to commit to socialize with people in her department. Hadeel also agreed that it was hard, but she perceived her family positively as she clarified:

I live here with my husband and two kids. I find it as an advantage. Sometimes, I feel it is kind of stressful to think about, but I would say it is more a benefit than a disadvantage. It is kind of gives you a break from this stress of school. I sometimes feel, oh, there is something else I am gonna have.

Students who lived with their families revealed that it certainly limited their experiences to their academic duties and that they did not participate in other activities beyond that.

4.5 Perceptions of cultural identity and the integration of religion, culture, and nationality

When I asked participants to describe their cultural identity, some students tended to describe themselves as being Muslim and Arab such as Hadeel and Ola. Other students added their

nationalities to their descriptions, beside their being Arab and Muslim, such as Tariq, Ahmed, and Omar. Interestingly, Omar prioritized his religious identity as he said:

I describe myself as a Muslim first then Arab.

Omar explained:

I feel more belonging to the Muslim world than [my national] world as [an Arab country] itself because to me that's a reason for division... When you say Palestine, Jordan, all these countries as independent countries they never been independent countries on their own. They always... part of them... were the Muslim national [world].

Sami, in contrast to Omar, restricted his cultural identity to his nationality as he answered:

I go with the nationality.

Other participants provided detailed descriptions. For instance, Sara and Jabir saw themselves as conservative and religious. Jabir said:

My cultural identity I would say is much more conservative than here.

Sara said:

I am a very religious person. The way I dress is different even maybe from some [Arab Muslim] people. I am restricted in food. We respect the family a lot.

Moreover, both Ayesha and Nadine lived in more than one place, so they were exposed to more than one culture throughout their lives. Ayesha could not attach herself to one culture but leaned into being attached to the religion as she explained:

I can't say that I have a unique cultural identity because I feel like I travelled in so many parts of the world. I feel like I can't attach myself to one particular identity in terms of culture, but I attach myself to my Muslim identity. I am quite attached to my Islamic identity even though I can see it differently from other points of the Muslim world.

Nadine had a different experience than Ayesha. She said:

I spent most of my life in North America collectively so as a child and as an adult, and then I had 12 years between those times I lived in [my country]. I felt a lot more different in [my country] in that time than I did being a child or an adult in North America. I don't know if that's the way I was brought up. Maybe part of it or it is because of confusion within myself I don't know where I fit.

Nadine was torn between the conservative culture and traditions of her country and the open American culture. Nadine finally reached to a new understanding of her cultural identity as she explicated:

And then, as the time went by, I realized that I didn't have to do it. I could fit in more than one box. And right now, eight years later, I do think that I fit in two boxes. I do feel that I don't conform completely with the Canadian cultural society, nor do I conform in the [Arab] cultural society, but I do fit in both or in between, I guess.

Some students believed that they have changed and integrated other cultural aspects into their culture such as Sara and Tariq. Sara said:

I feel I got some of the culture of here, mixed with [Arab Muslim] culture, mixed with the Muslim identity and I feel different.

In addition, Tariq said:

What I want to make it my culture or try to have that in my character is combination between the good things we have in our cultures and the good things here in Canadian culture.

Ayesha theorized about culture as she said:

We need to think of culture as dynamic and I believe that there must be certain effort also because we expect the others to understand us, we need also to make an effort to understand the others.

Collectively, Arab Muslim graduate participants in this study understood their cultural identities in relation to religion, nationality, and culture. However, they varied in their understanding of their own cultural identities. Some students tended to prioritize the religion over the culture and the nationality. Other students seemed to ascribe themselves and their culture to their nationalities. In addition, some students who lived in more than one country and were exposed

to more than one culture throughout their lives did not ascribe themselves neither to a specific nation nor culture.

4.6 Constructing and reconstructing the Muslim identity

I followed up questioning the participants about the changes that may have occurred to their understanding of themselves being Muslims and Arabs since they arrived Canada. I asked this question directly and indirectly throughout my conversation with each participant. Many participants revealed that the long period of doing their graduate studies allowed them to be exposed to other cultures and to have time to reflect on their understanding of themselves as Muslims. For instance, Hadeel discussed the reasons for the change in understanding her Muslim identity as she said:

Moving into here allowed me to be exposed to other cultures even within the Islamic religion, and part of it is also my husband. He reads a lot and sometimes we have these discussions..... So, I would say the sense of understanding of myself has differed.

Even before, I wouldn't feel that confident to talk about my religion. Now, I am more confident.... I think I allowed the stereotypes that I think I assumed that people have against me and prevented me from being open to talk. I found it a sensitive topic to discuss.

Hadeel continued to explain:

Coming to here, I felt that maybe it [being Muslim] is different than what is here. I can say it is not normal to here because it is still different, and that makes it a big challenge for me to answer, for example, some of the questions and understanding these things that I have been doing like the prayers, the fasting, wearing hijab. So, I needed a time where I do self-reflect and understand these things for myself.

Tariq also had a similar experience to Hadeel. Tariq said:

In [my home country], we were living Islam as a culture, so we do things because this is what we learned when we were kids. This is right and wrong without really understanding why or thinking or even having the option of not doing the wrong thing because if you do wrong thing you have the pressure from the family, friends, society and all of these things.

Tariq explained how the pressure from family and society affected him:

If your parents, for example, taught you right things, you are going to do it because you were brought up like that. Not because you are really convinced. I am not saying I wasn't convinced! I didn't think about it. Just I was brought up like that and I grew up like that and that's me, and it is difficult to change.

Things changed for Tariq when he started living in Canada away from his family and society. Tariq recalled:

But when I came here, you can choose any path you want really... For example, I know some people came from my country as well [who] even became atheists. Some of them start to drink. Some of them start to go partying and clubbing and these things. So, I had to choose, and I chose the way I grew up with but this time I chose it because I thought about it and I am convinced that this is a right way. So, my understanding to myself as a Muslim definitely changed. Maybe my habits or my behaviours didn't change but now I am convinced that this is what I want.

Furthermore, Omar believed that living in Canada shaped his identity and particularly his way of thinking as he said:

Over the past 7 years, all your ideas change. So, being here gave me the chance to study whatever ideology I don't know, think without the external influence, that's kind of an advantage. You could listen to whoever you want, you could read whatever you want. Not that I read much but essentially you can kind of build your own way of thinking without being influenced that might have been back home.

Omar added:

Right now, I am, I think, more critical of what I hear. For example, when I listen the Jumaah ceremony, the Khotba, [the preaching on Fridays during the Muslim gathering at mosques] you have more critical thinking of it. Not because I got affected by the Canadian way of living, no that's not about it! Because I have the chance to sit by myself and the internet is full you can listen to what you want.

Additionally, when Ola lived in the dorms, her experience living with other girls introduced her to the Western lifestyle of university students. She believed that this experience allowed her to appreciate her religion, family, and culture more than ever. To Ola, family means support. Ola found that the girls she met in the dorms do not usually find family and religious support when they are depressed. On the contrary, Ola believed that Muslim families provide support to Muslim girls when they need it. Hence, from the cases she witnessed of depression and suicide while living in the dorm, Ola concluded that the Muslim lifestyle that is supported by family and religion is better than the Western lifestyle.

In addition, Nadine revealed that her understanding of herself has changed. Because she lived her life in both an Arab country and the US, she was confused when she arrived Canada. She felt a need to preserve her national identity more than her Muslim and cultural identity at the beginning, but realized that there are other ways of expressing who she is as she explained:

Because I used to feel in the beginning when I first came here [that] preserving not the Muslim but the [national] identity was very very important. So, I had to be dressed in a certain way, walk with certain people, be friends with certain people, [and] have a relation even with my husband has to be in a certain way.

Nadine explained:

I felt that I had a very narrow definition of what it means to be a Muslim. I think being as an Arab was not important to me as much as identity of me following a certain faith. So, Arab or no-Arab it doesn't matter, to me at least, as long I follow the thing. And I felt that I needed to follow my faith in a certain way but then I realized that there are so many other interpretations and I realized that I was looking at it in one way whereas there are multiple ways.

Moreover, Jabir, Sami, Ahmed, Ola, and Sara agreed that living with other cultures allowed them to reflect and understand themselves as Muslims and Arabs which led them to appreciate their religion more. As Ahmed articulated,

Because you got to meet people of different cultures, different ideologies, different thinking, so you learn a lot from them and it causes to strengthen your beliefs.

Omar also expressed that his change was toward being more religious as he said:

Over time, I actually feel more belonging to my religion. I feel closer basically.

Although most students agree that living in Canada provided them with the opportunity to reflect and understand themselves in a way that they would never find back home, some students have their own worries. As Omar indicated,

I am planning to go home after I finish. If I am by myself, I think I could be here. I can still keep my identity, but like when you have children I think it is more difficult to grow up in Canadian society. So, life here is easier than back home, but in terms of keeping your identity it is difficult especially for religion.

Although Omar is a Canadian citizen, he did not feel he belongs to Canada. He planned to go back home when he finishes his PhD because it is important for him to preserve the religious/cultural identity for his future children.

Furthermore, Sami also had similar fears to Omar's as he said:

In terms of my family, I start to worry a little bit here in Canada more than the US. My daughter, she is 6 years now, so she started having school, meeting kids, bringing some concepts and believes that we are against. So that's I would say the negative side here in Canada. I start to worry about how many years I am going to spend here, how this is going to affect my daughter.

Sami was somehow torn between applying for permanent residency to live in Canada and going back home to preserve the Muslim religious and cultural identity for his kids. He liked living in Canada and thought he would make things happen in contrast to being in his country where he had a painful experience.

Living in Canada as graduate students had a major impact on Arab Muslim students' thinking about their cultural identities. Most of these students did not question their culture and

religion when they lived in their countries of origin. Living in Canada and being graduate students allowed them to rethink their cultural and religious identities. Arab Muslim graduate students comprise a heterogeneous group. Some students had essentialist understanding while others had constructivist understanding of their religion.

4.7 The campus reflecting religious and cultural experiences of students

Many students expressed the effect of the campus on their experiences as Muslim Arab graduate students at UBC. Throughout the interviews, participants talked about how the unique aspects of the campus environment including its spaces, discourses, and practices contributed to exploring their cultural identities as Arab Muslim Graduate students.

a. Spaces

Three themes were found when participants talked about their experiences of the spaces on-campus as Arab Muslim graduate students. These are as follows: the need for religious integration on campus, the need for cultural integration on-campus, and the experience of the on-campus housing.

i. The need for religious integration on-campus

Because practicing Muslims perform five prayers a day, the need for places such as multi-faith rooms is integral to Muslim students. Seven participants expressed that they faced some difficulties finding proper places to pray on-campus. Tariq said:

One thing I don't like here on-campus is that the only permanent place that we can pray at is Brock Hall, the Musallah [praying place in Arabic] there which is really

far away and even that it is multi-faith room. It is not dedicated for Muslims, so anyone really can step in there and do other type of prayers. . . . So that's a problem, and that place is really small and far away and it is 15 minutes walking from my lab to that space forth and it is 15 minutes going back so that's not convenient.

In Addition, Hadeel agreed with Tariq that the one official place for praying on-campus is not enough. Hadeel must walk for 10 minutes to get there. At first, she used to go there daily to perform her prayers and to meet some Arab friends, but after three to four years she stopped going. She would try to find any empty room in her lab area to pray.

This act of finding a nearby place to pray is common among Muslim students. However, some students felt shy or conscious, while some did it with ease. Moreover, some students navigated places for praying alone while others navigated in groups such as Muslim graduate students at the Faculty of Engineering who decided to find a room to perform their prayers daily together on specific time and place.

Arab Muslim graduate students accommodated their needs to perform their daily prayers on-campus on their own. No student reported any kind of harassment or aggression regarding their praying together in public. However, one student, in the Faculty of Engineering, expressed feeling bothered because they put a sign restricting the use of the washroom beside the place they used to pray at together for staff only. Using washroom is related to the performance of 'Wudhu' that Muslims usually do before praying. Wudhu is washing of the face, arms, and feet with water in a certain order. That student believed that because the washrooms were not equipped with facilities to make Wudhu, like the washrooms designed for Mosques, Muslim students spilled water on the floor which made people in the Faculty upset. He thought it was kind of discrimination against Muslim students.

Wondering about the religious integration on-campus, Ayesha said it is not about the campus being a secular place because that claim is a fallacy. In fact, religion exists on-campus in various forms such as the policy on religious holidays in the syllabus, the Christian religion holidays that the school follows, and the visible existence of churches and a religious college on-campus. Indeed, Muslim students wished to be more visible on-campus and to have better accommodations for their religious needs.

ii. The need for cultural integration on-campus

Beside religious accommodation, Arab Muslim graduate students expressed their needs and wishes for cultural representation on-campus. Ayesha, for example, wished to see visible representation of the Arab and Muslims as a culture not as a religion as she argued:

We don't have anything that would show that there is a Muslim presence because space is a form of legitimizing certain presence. The space is a form of legitimizing certain presence. We put a totem to legitimize, to remind people that this is a space of Indigenous people. Of course, I am not comparing the mosque to the totem. No! but if we agree that it is a welcoming space, why do we have a church and don't have a mosque?

Ayesha explained:

Visually, let's take UBC as a space, and you get from University Boulevard, from 16th, from the 41st, and you enter all these directions so there is a lot of presence of religious symbols or cultural symbols, but we don't have any cultural symbols of [Muslims].

Ayesha compared UBC to other competitive universities. She explained:

In so many universities, I take Harvard, I take Oxford, I take George Town, they have centers that are related to Cultural Muslim Studies. I think in George Town we [have] Al-Waleed Bin Talal Center of... which is a very prestigious center where people bring visiting schools [and] bring peer researchers.

Ayesha wished to have cultural integration on-campus that is visibly present as she said:

There should be a place like that! where we can have people who are donors from other places, but it meant to serve as a Mosque on Fridays, it can serve as a cultural center, it can serve as an open space.... Everybody can enter, you can enter there,

you can ask about Christianity, you can ask about, you know... Why not, for example, an Islamic Center?

In addition, Sara distinguished between the religion and culture and wished to see Arab clubs or association on-campus to keep the culture as she justified:

I wish to see [an] Arab club or something for the culture, because for teaching my daughter the religion is different than teaching my daughter the culture, the habits, the everyday habits, the coffee, like you know, these things.

Indeed, Arab Muslim graduate students expressed their needs for cultural integration and representation on-campus beside religious integration.

iii. The experience of on-campus housing

Eight of the interviewed graduate students lived on-campus. Six of them lived at the student family residence offered by UBC that is called Acadia Park while two of them lived in student dorms. Sara and Ayesha believed that living on-campus provided them with a sense of being accepted and understood as Arab and Muslim students as Sara explained:

Actually, the good thing about UBC is that we live on-campus, so the campus community in general is very multicultural. Because you find people from Brazil, you find people from Korea, you find Asian people, so it's very multicultural so you feel comfortable. So, I think it is a good environment in general for people, I guess, so you don't feel odd because almost everyone is like you. He [she] is not from here.

Ayesha agreed with Sara:

The good thing about the campus is that we come from different backgrounds...., we see different people on-campus, we see different people in courses.... I find that living on-campus, it gives me a sense of... a kind of acceptance that you don't feel in other ways.

Ayesha also talked about family housing from a mother's perspective. Ayesha described her feelings of the place:

I feel very comfortable that we had a space on-campus for families. Acadia park is a great thing. Because when we come to a place like here, [referring to the café we were at where there are noises from kids in the café. This is post school time]

we have kids speaking and talking it doesn't bother us, we are mothers and we know that is something very normal. So, the fact that there is a chance to have a place like Acadia Park is a great thing!

She recalled:

When I did my Masters, because all the people that I know don't do any studies, I felt like I am the only person who has kids and doing this. When I started living in Acadia Park, it is a very common thing. So, it makes you feel like no! having kids is not a problem. On the opposite, it is a positive thing.

Ayesha believe that the family housing is a good and safe place to live. She said:

So, it is a blessing because when you have a family you can rent a house here, and the house is cheaper than elsewhere. So, it becomes like a privilege. It is not like something that bothers you. Also, just feeling safe. I feel like this place is safe.

Nadine and Hadeel shared Ayesha's positive experiences of living in on-campus family housing as graduate students and as mothers. Hadeel found that living on-campus allowed her to be more engaged in the extra-curricular activities as she said:

Moving to campus was a really big change for me! Saving the time. I find it less anxious to go home like to finish things quickly. I have more opportunities to get engaged in some of the social activities on-campus, or even participate in some of the after-hours events in the Faculty.

Nadine described her experience living on-campus in her earlier days before having her son as she said:

In the beginning before I had my son, it was a little bit isolated I have to say. Because most of my friends are in downtown or Yaletown. There was some isolation, but with the car, it's seemed OK. I seemed to be able to use the public transit, and I learned how to use it very quickly. So, I relied heavily on public transit, but I did feel that I was a little bit far away.

Interestingly, things got easier for Nadine after having her son. Nadine explained:

Once I had my son though, I did not feel that [isolation] anymore because all the amenities are available here: child care, schools, parks, friends, play dates, and it just seemed a lot easier being closed to where my son likes to play as well as where I work and study. So, it is a lot more convenient.

Moreover, graduate students who live in the dorms did not like it. Jabir said:

Living on-campus is becoming much harder because it's becoming congested and noisy. I wish I can go out, but it's now harder, because my way of living, I have got used to living on campus.

Jabir explained:

Grad students are actually, especially in the weekend, noisy and it's not a best place to live in for a grad student.

Furthermore, Ola used to live in the on-campus dorms, but she moved off-campus because she was not comfortable sharing her room with other students and had some issues regarding cleanliness of the place.

The experiences of Arab Muslim Graduate students who lived in family housing offered by the university reveals that they had positive experiences while those who live in the dorms did not. Their positive experiences stemmed from the family-friendly environment created in the family housing community, a sense of acceptance and inclusion, and being close to study and family; hence students found it easier to balance between their academic duties and their families.

b. Discourses

Two themes emerged when participants were asked if they have ever had a syllabus, a class discussion, study content, or a university policy that might have challenged or embraced their identities as Muslim Arab students. These are a sense of empowerment and the influence of the field of study on students experiencing their cultural identity.

i. A sense of student empowerment

Some students sensed that the explicit and the embodied discourses at UBC are towards student empowerment. Nadine, for example, sensed that she felt not only student empowerment at UBC but also female empowerment which affected her positively as she explained:

I felt more empowered because there is a lot of female empowerment within the UBC, and they are very vocal about it. Even the policies, even the students. So, maybe that's probably the most important thing within UBC is to feel a little bit more empowered.

Nadine explained what made her feel empowered as a student by saying:

The main thing I felt, within these eight years that I've been studying and working here was acceptance. So, I've been in hiring committees and I have been in many research assistance jobs. I have been involved with projects. I also worked as GAA in my department and I never felt belittled or never felt discounted or that my opinion did not matter. I always felt that I mattered, and that changed a lot in me personally and professionally.

Nadine also described feeling empowered as a Muslim Arab student as she said:

Sometimes, you sit in a table, I am the only student and then everybody else is a professor. And then your opinions matter, and you are asked to present your opinion. I feel that's a factor when, you know, you being a Muslim Arab.

Nadine admitted that her earlier feelings of shyness prevented her opinion to be heard, but once she overcame her shyness and felt empowered as a student, things changed to the better for her:

Sometimes or in the beginning I was discounted because of my shyness. Now, I am sitting in a table with amazing scholars and amazing people and they were really genuinely interested in what I had to say. I felt if that is part of UBC policies of including students' opinions and empowering students and their voices, I think that did affect me positively.

Many other students felt that their cultural identities are being accepted and respected by their supervisors and colleagues and provided the example of celebrating Eid which is the official Muslim Holiday. Sara recalled:

The positive thing is that my supervisor is supportive. When I tell him I have the Eid, I will take two days off, [or] I will take one day off to celebrate it, he said, "Yeah, congratulation", and "Enjoy the day". Yeah, he's very supportive in this. I don't know how some other people do in their labs, but he always understands. This is my holiday, I will take that time off and he's very fine with that, and this is a very positive thing.

In addition, Hadeel said she had never had a problem taking the Eid holiday off. She remembered that she checked the UBC policies for the religious holidays before asking permission from her supervisor.

Ahmed also had a positive experience in his classes. He would ask his professors to adjust the times of quizzes on Fridays so that he would not miss the Friday prayers, and the professor adjusted the times without question.

Omar tended to be proactive by planning the schedule of his classes based on the times of the prayers during the year, so he would not face conflicts:

Generally, I never had a problem because I just chose my courses carefully to avoid prayer times.

In addition, Sami was impressed by the university's leadership playing a positive role in supporting Muslim students as Sami recalled:

I remember when things happen in Hajj [Muslim Pilgrimage] like last year or the year before that the President of the university visited us in the Musallah in the Jumuah [Friday prayer] and he had good speech. Then, the president visited us the next year when someone was killed, well I think this year, when someone was killed in Montreal in the mosque.

In contrast to Sami, Tariq criticized that same incident as he said:

I think when the university talk to the Muslim body, they don't give much importance to them. So, every year they come only once to Friday prayer so they can talk to many people. They come once!

Tariq recalled:

Even the university president, they mentioned he is going to come, then it was cancelled, then the events in Quebec happened, so he decided to come after that. But he cancelled his visit originally!

Tariq wondered in criticism:

Why do you come to the Friday prayer? Because you want to talk to many Muslims. Why don't you organize, for example, event with food? People are going to come. But they don't want even to put that effort or pay any money to talk to the Muslim body. They just do it because they want to say they did it. They talked to the Muslims body but like the same talk every year. I have been here for 7 years and this is my 8th and I didn't see a change or what's the importance of this? It is just, I think, kind of check-list they have to do and they just do it.

Undeniably, the Arab Muslim graduate students in this study felt empowered by UBC's policies and regulations that were seen to accept Muslims and their culture, through professors' and supervisors' understanding of Muslim students religious and cultural needs, and through the support they received from UBC's leadership. However, this sense of empowerment is felt at the individual level mostly. Collectively as a Muslim group, Arab Muslim graduate students were critical that the university could support and empower the Muslim student body in better ways than the annual routine "lip service".

ii. The influence of the field of study on students experiencing their cultural identity

When I discussed the sense of cultural identity with participants, there were some interesting contrasts between those participants' who are in the so-called "soft disciplines" (e.g., sociology, arts, and education) and those in the so-called "hard disciplines" (e.g., engineering, physical sciences). For example, Ayesha who is a PhD student in the faculty of Education expressed the following:

It is interesting to see how the university allows me to be critical not only of the systems here but also critical of the systems that we have there [in the Arab world].

When I asked Ayesha if her sense of understanding herself as being a Muslim and Arab has changed by the university experience, she replied,

I think that the academic experience makes a big difference! And when I say academic experience, I mean what we are studying. I am not studying engineering or [so], I am studying social justice. I am studying different forms of identity, belonging, critical theory.

So, you start thinking of things from a very critical perspective. So, you start thinking of yourself and your what you call, I don't call it anymore home country because I feel like I changed a lot to feel like [my country] is home.

In contrast, Sami, a PhD student at the faculty of Dentistry, told me how shocked and impressed he was when the president visited Muslim students and showed support. He added:

For me it is shocking. The President coming, and they are trying to express that feeling that they are supporting us. So that's a good experience. I haven't had any feeling or experience from my team regarding any experience in the whole world, so I am just working like a machine with them. But with the President, with the people in the administration of the school I think they are doing fine.

Jabir, a PhD student in the faculty of Engineering, said that the only time he discussed his cultural identity was when he took an elective course in Higher Education. Jabir said:

Usually in engineering, it's rare to for such discussion to pop out, but a course I took in the faculty of education we had discussion about Muslim world. We had discussion about education in the Muslim world and Muslim world universities and all universities. I think she [the professor] even in that course showed us a documentary about education and science in the Muslim world. So, that was something good. To engage in a discussion about your culture and about your identity and how others may see your culture.

Students at the graduate level of study certainly had critical perceptions. However, the field of study did affect students' thinking and understanding of themselves and of their religious and cultural identities.

c. Practices

When participants were asked if they have ever been involved in any practices in the university that related to their identity as an Arab Muslim student, some students talked about their involvement in the Muslim Student Association (MSA). Jabir said that he volunteered to manage the schedule of the Friday prayer and to organize the speakers for the Friday prayer. Jabir also volunteered in events organized by the MSA such as the Islamic awareness week.

Most students said that they would attend the activities and events for Muslim and Arab students from time to time inside or outside the university. Because of family and study commitments, they tended to attend more than they volunteered.

Interestingly, two students had different approaches to events organized by and for Muslim Arabs. Ola said:

I like to participate in the [national] Club, sometimes in the Arab Club, but I am afraid to participate in the Muslim Club because I feel it is terrorism-targeted.

Ola explained:

One girl I know from the [national] Club used to send me invitations to political events discussing Palestine and so on, but I am afraid to go. On the one hand, I don't want to get involved with something that may cause me troubles. On the other hand, I feel that if someone hates Islam, he will target and attack these events or these places! I try to stay away from these events.

Moreover, Omar used to avoid such events but for other reasons than Ola. Omar said:

Generally, I try to avoid! You can tell from the beginning. There are many clubs but for me I just try to keep to myself because once you start getting involved, it gets easy I guess to get dragged into uncomfortable situations.

Omar provided the example of hand-shaking with women and that he does not feel comfortable doing that. Omar also explained a deeper reason for him avoiding such events:

I don't agree with much of what's going on. I give an example. For example, I know there is a lot of this [national] club here. I saw them once. I think I went in my first year or something. I saw them once. They call it the Club Days at the beginning of the school year, and they had this girl who, you know, [Omar's voice changes in satire pointing to his shoulders] which does not represent anything of the [home country] I know. So, I stayed away from that.

I asked Omar what he meant by pointing to his shoulders and if that meant the scarf representing his country or not. He replied:

No! She was wearing cut clothes [sleeveless top] and that does not represent [my country]. From that day, I just stayed away.

Omar provided a justification:

They have a different way of thinking I just don't agree with. I have nothing shared with these guys. Absolutely nothing shared with these guys.

Most Arab Muslim graduate students preferred to get involved in the Arab Muslim communities available on-campus through get together gatherings, religious practices, or through cultural students' clubs. However, two students revealed they preferred to avoid for different reasons.

4.8 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter detailed the experiences of 10 Arab Muslim graduate students at the university of British Columbia. The findings are based on personal interviews regarding their experiences on campus influencing their religious and cultural identity. Arab Muslim graduate students faced some linguistic and psychological challenges at the start of their studies in a process of adopting to the Canadian learning environment. The visible identification with Islamic religion that some Muslim students presented on-campus made it a challenge for female students in particular and subjected them to discrimination. Furthermore, students with families usually tended to limit their engagement in the university to the academic studies. Furthermore, Arab Muslim graduate students understood their cultural identities in relation to religion, nationality, and culture. Arab Muslim graduate students in this study were comprised of a heterogenous group. Even though living the graduate academic life allowed all students to reflect on their understanding of their cultural and religious identities, some had essentialist views while others had constructivist views. However, despite the differences, Arab Muslim graduate students expressed similar needs for religious and cultural integration on-campus. The university's policies, dialogues, and personnel

advocated diversity and student empowerment at the individual level. There is a need for the university to empower and support Arab Muslim students as a group. The Muslim Students Association (MSA) as well as students' clubs played a role in integrating the religious and cultural identities for some Arab Muslim Graduate students.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Practical Implications, Limitations, Recommendations and Conclusion

The university and in a general way, all teaching systems, which appear simply to disseminate knowledge, are made to maintain a certain social class in power; and to exclude the instruments of power of another social class.

Michel Foucault

5.1 Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the lived experiences of Arab Muslim graduate students in constructing their cultural and religious identities within the context of the university. An examination was conducted of the essence of these students' academic, religious, cultural, and gender experiences and the influence of these experiences on their student life experiences. A qualitative phenomenological method of inquiry was employed in order to expansively explore Arab Muslim Graduate students' lived experiences at a Canadian university.

Findings show that these students face several challenges on-campus. Arab Muslim graduate students at the University of British Columbia face academic challenges resulting from their feeling overwhelmed by the new and extensively different study environment from what they previously experienced and from underestimating their academic abilities. All female students reported facing discriminative remarks based on their Muslim identity sometime during their stay in Canada. In addition, students who live with their families revealed that familial commitments limited their on-campus experiences to their academic duties and that they could not participate beyond that. Furthermore, Arab Muslim graduate students understand their cultural identities in relation to religion, nationality, and culture. Even though living the graduate academic life allowed all students to reflect on their understandings of their cultural and religious identities, some had essentialist views while others had constructivist views. Despite the differences, students expressed similar needs for religious and cultural integration on-campus. Those students also revealed that the university's policies, dialogues, and personnel advocate diversity and student empowerment at the individual level. There is a need for the university to empower and support Arab Muslim students as a group. The MSA as well as students' clubs play a role in integrating the religious and cultural identities for Arab Muslim Graduate students.

This chapter first integrates the discussion of the literature and engages with theoretical implications. It considers the relationship of the findings to that of the literature discussed in this study while simultaneously examining the findings through a spatial triad framework that is theorized by Henri Lefebvre. This entails three interconnected aspects: representational space (spaces), representations of space (discourses), and spatial practice (practices). It also examines the findings considering the identity construction theories proposed by Stuart Hall and Benedict Anderson. This allows for the understanding of the essence of Arab Muslim graduate students' cultural and religious experiences and the influence of these experiences on their on-campus experiences. Second, practical implications of the findings are described in relation to the university's administration, international student practitioners, student affairs administrators, and educators towards providing more effective services for Arab Muslim graduate students at UBC specifically and Canadian Universities generally. Third, a discussion on limitations of this study follows. Fourth, recommendations for further study and future research is included. Finally, a brief conclusion is provided.

5.2 Relationship of the Findings to Literature and Theoretical Implications

1. Academic challenges to adapt to the Canadian learning environment

In the process of adjusting to the learning environment at the University of British Columbia, Arab Muslim graduate students faced some linguistic challenges. Linguistic challenges that international/foreign students face is evident in the literature. Arab Muslim students at Western universities reported facing linguistic challenges with adjusting to the Western, particularly American, academic environment (Dimandja, 2017; Majumdar, 2008). Furthermore, female Saudi graduate students indicated that one of their challenges at a comprehensive doctoral

university in the United States is related to their insufficient linguistic abilities (Sandekian et al, 2015).

In addition, Arab Muslim graduate students in this study revealed feeling overwhelmed by the new and different learning environment compared to other previous learning environments. Different learning styles have been evident between the West and East where Western education stresses active student-centered learning and encourages rational thinking. In contrast, the Eastern education stresses passive, teacher-centered learning, and normally students obtain knowledge directly from teaching of religion be it Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Confucianism (Hassan & Jamaludin, 2010). Research has indicated that learning style preferences of Middle-Eastern students are different than those of the mostly Western-trained faculty (Lemke-Westcott & Johnson, 2013; Abukhattala, 2004).

In addition, Arab Muslim graduate students reported having internal thoughts and opinions about themselves as being different and hence belittling their academic abilities. Participants who reported having such feelings believed that they originate from within and not from comments by their colleagues and professors. This might be due to the polite Canadian culture and good manners where people usually avoid explicit negative remarks. Interestingly, existing literature on Arab Muslim students' experiences showed the opposite in American universities. Undergraduate Muslim international students on American campuses stated facing challenges with the way some of their American instructors and students perceive their intelligence and academic ability based on their racial/ethnic identity (Dimandja, 2017). In my study, most students revealed that a culture of acceptance on-campus help them in their process of adapting to the Canadian learning environment.

2. The influence of the visible Muslim Identity on students' experiences

The religious practice of wearing the hijab for female Muslim students is a visible indicator of their religious identity. In the increasing atmosphere of Islamophobia, all female Arab Muslim graduate students who wear the hijab said that they feel self-conscious at some point because they look different. The finding that women faced discrimination based on the religious, cultural and/or ethnic identity while male students did not is mirrored in a similar phenomenological study on the experiences of undergraduate international students on American campuses. The study showed that male Muslim students did not have challenges with being visibly identified as Muslims while female Muslims students did (Dimandja, 2017). Also, male participants at Dimandja's study (2017) admitted that they perceived resistance to their inclusion on campus when they attempted expressing their Muslim identity through their cultural marker, the thobe. In addition, current research on female Muslim international students indicated that the wearing of the hijab exposed them to experiences of obvious discrimination and isolation (Rahmath, Chambers, & Wakewich, 2016; Statistics Canada, 2017; Dimandja, 2017).

3. The influence of family on the academic experience

Most of the Arab Muslim Graduate Students interviewed in this study lived with their families. Their families unquestionably played a major role in their academic experiences as graduate students. They revealed that their familial commitments limit their academic experiences to academic duties as they do not very often commit to the outings that their colleagues have on weekends. This finding is reflected in the literature that PhD students from the Middle East reported family commitments was a factor among others affecting the progress of their research (Khozaei, et al, 2015). The literature also showed that women in general experienced significantly

more conflict in balancing their dual roles as parents and graduate students than their male counterparts (McCutcheon & Morrison, 2018). This is the case in this study where family narratives were provided by more female than male participants. Furthermore, I have not discussed in detail with participants the university's support for graduate students who are parents. Research showed there is a need for departmental and university initiatives designed to support graduate student parents (Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid, 2009).

4. Perceptions of the cultural identity and the integration of religion, culture, and nationality.

Arab Muslim graduate students revealed having various understandings of their own cultural identity. This is because Arabs and Muslims are a heterogeneous group. The various understandings that Arab Muslim graduate students presented in this study were validated in literature on identity construction theory. For students who ascribed their cultural identity to the nation, Hall (1996a) explained that national cultures are one of the main sources of cultural identity. Hall defined a national culture to be “a discourse - a way of constructing meanings which influences and organizes both our actions and our conceptions of ourselves. National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about ‘the nation’ with which we can identify, these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it” (p. 613).

Students who described their cultural identities as Arabs or by their nationalities had a set of meanings in mind of what makes them Arabs. It is “a system of cultural representation” (p. 612) such as Arabism, Saudism, Egyptianism.

Furthermore, national understanding of cultural identity was also described by Benedict Anderson's imagined communities. For Anderson, a nation is a symbolic community sharing a national narrative presented in national histories, literatures, the media, and popular culture (Hall (1996a, p. 613). Students who described their cultural identity in terms of the nation hold an essentialist understanding of themselves. Hall (1996a) argued that while "these [national] identities are not literally imprinted in our genes, we do think of them as if they are part of our essential natures" (p. 611).

Moreover, Hall (1996a) believed that ascribing oneself to the nation is a modern form of identity while ascribing oneself to religion, tribe, people, and region is a pre-modern form or is more in the traditional societies. Considering the findings, I argue that identifying one's cultural identity with the religion can be associated with traditional societies in a pre-modern form and can also be associated with a post-modern form of understanding identity. Further discussion will be presented when I discuss the next finding.

5. Constructing and reconstructing the Muslim identity

Some Arab Muslim graduate students said they did not question their cultural and religious identities when they lived in their home countries. However, once they lived in Canada as graduate students, they started to rethink and reconstruct their cultural identities. Those students who reflected on themselves, their culture, and religion said that they purposely chose to be practicing Muslims, felt attached to their religion, and for some, prioritized their attachment to religion when asked to define their cultural identity.

When these students lived in their Muslim countries where everybody around them was Muslim and the Islamic religion was taken for granted, they lived in Hall's so called "traditional societies." However, when they moved to Canada and lived among a heterogeneous community of different cultures and religions, they reconstructed their identities in Hall's post-modern identity construction form. According to Hall (1996a), dislocation "unhinges the stable identities of the past, but it also opens up the possibility of new articulations – the forging of new identities, the production of new subjects" (p. 600). It is through difference that identities are constructed or as Hall (1997) put it: "identity is a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative. It has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself" (p. 174).

For some students who lived in more than one culture, they were uncertain of what constituted their cultural identity. Living through difference, living through the others, living through time, and living through different discourses, practices and positions (Hall, 1996b) allowed some students to reconstruct their cultural and religious identities all the time. Their understanding of themselves may differ and they may carry multiple identities, or identity constellation as Nasir & Al-Amin (2006) put it, within themselves. Identity is related to the culture, religion, race, gender, ethnicity, and/or sexuality.

6. The campus reflecting religious and cultural experiences of students

Hall (1996b) noted that identities are constructed within and across different discourses, practices, and power positions. He urged for understanding identities "as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices" (p. 4). Therefore, I added a spatial lens into the thesis to view Arab Muslim graduate students' lived

experiences within the spaces, the discourses, and the practices taking place at the University of British Columbia. I, hence, employed Lefebvre's (1999) spatial triad as a framework for this thesis. The spatial triad conceptualized space to entail three interconnected aspects: representational space (spaces), representations of space (discourses), and spatial practice (practices). The spatial triad brought a social understanding of space to be socially (re)constructed and (re)constituted through students' practices in their everydayness. It should be reiterated that those three dimensions of space are theoretically distinguishable. However, they coexist, intertwine and overlap in real life (Fridolfsson & Elander, 2013).

a. Spaces

Spaces entail the physical environment of the campus. Representational space for Arab Muslim students is represented in cultural symbolism on-campus such as a Mosque or a cultural centre. There is a slowly growing body of research on the geography of the university. For example, Archibald (2004) and Sullivan (2012) examined the spaces of the University of British Columbia. Whereas the former study investigated various centers at the university to view knowledge as a spatial construct, the latter study examined the university of British Columbia as a queer space. While there are several studies examining Muslim students in Canada, the body of scholarly literature showed scarcity of studies on spatial identities of Muslim students in Canada and in British Columbia specifically.

i. A need for religious integration on-campus

Many Arab Muslim graduate students revealed that religion and the practices of Islam were a vital part of their lives that balanced their social tensions. Arab Muslim graduate students expressed their need for places to perform their daily prayers. These students stated facing daily

difficulties finding proper places to pray on-campus. The need to accommodate Muslim student prayer places on-campus has been long presented in the literature (Hopkins, 2011; Possamai, Dunn, Hopkins, Worthington & Amin, 2016; Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013; Dimandja, 2017).

I have not found any recommendation in the literature for accommodating washrooms to be equipped with facilities for Wudhu. This is more of a luxurious wish for Muslim students. Their vital need is having more designated places for prayers scattered on-campus so that they do not have to have long walks for a one designed place on campus and miss part of their classes or be forced to find a place on their own to pray and feel shy or conscious performing their prayers. It is noteworthy to indicate that most Arab Muslim graduate students did not have any objection sharing places with other non-Muslim students. All students expressed their wishes for multiple prayer places across campus whether they are multi-faith rooms or Muslims-only prayer rooms. Indeed, having specific rooms for prayers on-campus would take away the shyness, anxiety and/or consciousness that some Muslim students feel, including myself, while praying in public.

ii. A need for cultural integration on-campus

Some Arab Muslim graduate students differentiated between the culture and the religion. Therefore, beside the religious integration they wished to have on-campus, they needed and wished for cultural representation on-campus. Students appreciated having Arab clubs and Muslim students' associations on-campus. They viewed these associations as practices to preserve and celebrate their culture.

This is the representational space that Lefebvre theorizes about. It is the need for Arab Muslim students' cultural symbolic representations in spaces on-campus such as a Mosque or a

cultural centre. For students, this is an indication of and invitation to a welcoming space and inclusion for Muslim students. Strange & Banning (2015) argued that cultural symbols on-campus risk having the dilemma of including one group which often rests on the exclusion of other groups (intentional or not) which is ultimately challenging their sense of physical and/or psychological inclusion. This could be true for Muslim students who do not usually see a physical representation of their existence on-campus.

One example for a cultural representation for Muslim students is an on-campus cultural center. The center could be related to Muslim Cultural Studies, would attract visiting scholars and peer researchers on Islamic studies, would be supported by donors from other places, would serve as a Mosque on Fridays and as a cultural center, would be an open space where everybody can enter, and would serve not only Islamic studies but also other religions and faiths. In their book, Strange and Banning (2015) advocated for such cultural centers on-campus as they help “those who differ from the normative institutional press [to] find refuge, experience affirmation of identity, connect to peer support, and gather the necessary motivation and energy to continue resistance” (p. 172). In addition, such centers provide a place to charge students’ psychological batteries and find other Muslim students who may share a common experience (Strange and Banning, 2015). In fact, such cultural sites – monuments or markers – produce a process of “collective memory” (p. 375) for a social group to locate their identities in time and place (Inwood & Martin, 2008).

iii. The experience of on-campus housing

Arab Muslim graduate students who lived in family housing at UBC called (Acadia Pak) believed that living on-campus provided them with a sense of being accepted and understood as well as being safe. Students who were eligible to live in family housing on-campus were not local

and the families who lived there are from all over the globe. Differences and vibrancy are merits in this multicultural community which resulted in acceptance and inclusion. Furthermore, some interviewees argued that because everyone who lives there is educated, it was rare to find discrimination when in the community of family housing on-campus.

Generally, Arab Muslim graduate students who lived in Acadia Park have positive experiences. This is evident in the Acadia Park Community Needs Assessments Results Report in which 95% of students living in the community reported feeling that Acadia Park Student Family Housing is generally a safe neighbourhood. The UBC campus is generally considered by most students to be a safe environment. In addition, 60% of residents reported feeling part of a community, with higher numbers among those with children (Cowin & Ouillet, 2014).

It has been reported that balancing familial and academic responsibilities gets easier for students who live on-campus (Cowin & Ouillet, 2014). The study revealed that Arab Muslim Graduate students who live in the family housing offered by the university have positive experiences while those who live in the dorms did not. Further research on the experiences of students who live in the dorms is recommended.

b. Discourses

Discourses denote written and spoken communications. Within discourses, Hall (1996b) affirmed that identities are produced and constructed. Adding the spatial lens of Lefebvre's triad, discourses or (representations of space) imply a question of how Arab Muslim students experience the campus, and "may be imaginatively constructed or produced" (Fridolfsson & Elander, 2013, P. 324).

Two findings were relevant to the discourses of the university: a sense of empowerment and the influence of the discipline on students' experiencing their cultural identities.

i. A sense of empowerment

Some students sensed that the explicit and the implicit discourses at UBC support student empowerment. The findings of this study were similar to research on the experiences of undergraduate Muslim international students who perceived academic and social support from their institutional leaders, faculty members, and individuals (Dimandja, 2017). However, other studies showed that the university officials have not taken remarkable steps toward supporting Muslim students on-campus (Stubbs & Sallee, 2013). Cultural identities of Arab Muslim Graduate students do interfere with their academic lives. A supporting and understanding atmosphere is what these certainly students need.

ii. The influence of the disciplines on student's experiencing their cultural identities

Students at the graduate level of study undoubtedly have the skills of critical thinking. However, field of study affected students' thinking, understanding of themselves, and constructing their religious and cultural identities. Students who were in soft disciplines (e.g., sociology, arts, and education) affirmed that their sense of understanding themselves being Muslims and Arabs has changed since attending UBC. Research on annual surveys from student and faculty engagement in different institutions in United States and Canada showed that the hard disciplines (e.g., engineering, physical sciences) scored the lowest in deep learning indices, that is, reflective and integrative learning, compared to other disciplines. Moreover, education faculty maintained the highest levels in almost all the deep learning subscales (Osama & Andres, 2016). The research attributed this variation in deep learning to teaching styles and the dependence of hard disciplines on lecturing mainly. Further research on the effect of hard and soft disciplines on students is recommended.

C. Practices

Lefebvre (1999) explained that spatial practice “embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation” (p. 33). spatial practices (practices) for Muslim students might involve how they reuse on-campus spaces to practice their religion or to celebrate their culture.

Most Arab Muslim Graduate students in this study chose to get involved in the Arab Muslim communities available on-campus through get together gatherings, religious practices, or through cultural student clubs. Most students attended from time to time the activities and events for Muslim and Arab students inside or outside the university. Some of them tended to attend more than do volunteering due to family and study commitments. Some Arab Muslim graduate students stated their involvement in the Muslim Student Association (MSA). The MSA has been proven in the literature to play a positive role in Muslim students’ experiences. Students at North American universities expressed that the MSA provided a safe space and support for the Muslim community to practice their religion (Koller, 2015; Dimandja, 2017; Schatz, 2008; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013). Research also showed that MSAs on North American campuses need recognition and support from the leadership of the universities (Koller, 2015; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013).

5.3 Practical Implications of the Findings

Several implications for practice arose as a result of the findings from this study. It is my hope that these implications will benefit international student practitioners, student affairs administrators, and educators, as well as aid them in addressing the needs of Arab Muslim graduate

students at UBC particularly and Canadian Universities generally. It is evident that Arab Muslim graduate students faced academic challenges to adapt to the Canadian learning environment. Most students revealed that what helped them to adapt was a culture of acceptance and inclusion that they felt on-campus. This is particularly evident for students who lived in family housing at UBC. Acceptance and hence inclusion are vital to marginalized students whether their identities are, for example, Muslims, Black, and LGBTQs. Students who stated feeling empowered said that being accepted was important to them. However, no students referred to a university program or initiative that directly affected them positively and allowed them to feel accepted and empowered. Student services at UBC provided resources to students about diversity on campus. The webpage stated:

The success of UBC is linked to being a diverse and welcoming place for all. Explore resources to learn more about diversity on campus and how you can help promote an inclusive environment. (UBC students Services, 2018)

The communities promoted for diversity on-campus include disability, sexual diversity, trans and gender diversity, women, race and ethnicity, and students who are parents (UBC Student Services, 2018). While it is impressive that UBC maintains a safe campus for diverse groups of students, it is somehow distressing not to find any mention of religious groups. The literature reflected the fact that Muslim students are underrepresented and underserved in North American campuses (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Koller, 2015; Stubbs & Sallee, 2013). Hence, including Muslim along with other faiths in UBC's initiatives on campus is needed.

In addition, there is a need for deeper and meaningful representations for Muslim students. A personal example of the representation Muslims students receive on-campus is that every time I attend a public event on-campus, a photographer takes a picture of me. Being a female student wearing the hijab would bring a perfect representation of a multicultural diverse campus. Such an

example indicates a false representation of Muslim students on-campus. Muslim students require better understanding and representations from the university.

The representations that Muslim students ask for are physical, verbal, and practical. That is to be represented in the places, discourses, and practices of the University of British Columbia. Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) elucidated: “students’ experiences have to do both with characteristics of the student and characteristics of the campuses and their surrounding communities” (p. 24). Arab Muslim graduate students demand designated places for prayers distributed on-campus rather than the one small multi-faith room in Brock Hall (on-campus). Currently, Muslim students use random nearby places on-campus to perform their daily prayers. They also reserve and/or rent places on-campus for formal Muslim gathering occasions such as the celebration of Eid. In this way, they are significantly different from the Christian locations. In addition, a cultural center representing the Arab and Muslim culture is desired among Arab Muslim students. The UBC has a religious center located on-campus for Jewish students that was built through a non-profit organization called The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life. Such a cultural center could be a responsibility for the Muslim students on-campus represented through the MSA.

Furthermore, Arab Muslim graduate students recommended informing new students in the orientation days about religious places on-campus, and national and cultural students clubs so they get to easily adapt to life on-campus.

In addition, considering the recent and current Islamophobic atmosphere in North America, initiatives on religious and cultural awareness related to Islam and Muslims are recommended. This is especially crucial for students in hard disciplines who usually do not have formal discussions on such topics. Moreover, educators may engage students in discussions concerning the heterogeneity among particular marginalized groups as a way to recognize not only Muslim

students but those who carry multiple identities or live at various intersections. Such discussions can create ways for those students to more easily navigate their lives on-campus by expressing their fullest selves (McGuire, Casanova, & Davis, 2016). Beside initiatives on discussing Islamophobia and Muslim student identities, such discussions would have been reinforced through hiring and/or inviting scholars on Islamic issues. Arab Muslim graduate students at UBC noted that there is a need for more scholars who can bring a background or an understanding of the language, history, and different kinds of dynamics on the issue of Islam and Muslims especially in relation to educational institutions.

Nasir & Al-Amin (2006) called these recommendations for Muslim students' needs on-campus "small acts of kindness." While some of these recommendations may seem trivial, such small acts of kindness from the university's personnel are highly valued by Muslim students and would crucially contribute to form positive experiences for these students and would make a huge difference to their sense of their culture and religion and their sense of being included on campus. While this thesis focused on Arab Muslim graduate students, I would like to conclude with a more global perspective on the essential work of supporting all students' cultural and religious practices and identities on campuses across the world.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

It is important to note that, like any other study, this phenomenological study is not free from limitations. The limitations of the present study include the followings. First, I did my best to be an insider with my participants so that I could represent them. However, this might have worked as a barrier. Because I visibly look like a practicing Muslim by wearing the hijab, my

visible Muslim identity might have intimidated and inhibited some students from sharing negative experiences they might have had about their religion or culture.

Second, most of the participants were recruited through Muslim circles such as email groups and WhatsApp groups for Muslim students and personal acquaintances of Arab Muslim graduate students. Since my Arab and Muslim friends are mostly females, I sought the assistance of my Arab Muslim graduate student husband to find my male participants. He approached the MSA. Hence, all the male participants in this study through the MSA. Because MSA was a place of recruitment, all male students in this study happen to be practicing Muslims. This, I believe, limits the study from having a heterogenous Arab Muslim students in terms of their religious interests and beliefs as it resulted in a similar group in terms of thinking and perceiving their religious identity.

Third, I felt a mutual embodied barrier when interviewing men. During my interviews with male participants, I felt a slight uncomfortable sense that sometimes came from the male participants and other times came from me. This uncomfortable sense originates from my personality as an introverted person and more importantly from the segregated culture from which I came where men and women are usually separated, and when they interact they usually have formal conversations. The first male participant I interviewed asked to meet at a more formal place such as a study area instead of a café. I respected that and chose similar places for all of the remaining male participant interviews. Usually, the uncomfortable feeling I had faded away once the participant opened up. It is interesting to compare my attitude and decision as a researcher and other researchers such as Al-Amrani (2011) who decided that because he is an insider, he would follow the cultural norms of gender segregation of the researcher and the participants and restricted his participants to male students only. This resulted in a limitation in his study of missing the

gender factor. Although Al-Amrani argued that some conversations with females could be very sensitive and hard to achieve, I argue that interviewing both females and males could be achieved in the large heterogenous group of Arab Muslim students with careful consideration of an embodied sensitivity. Future research should take careful consideration of gender when conducting research with Arab Muslims.

Lastly, to preserve the confidentiality of participants, I did not relate the country of origin of each participant. Because the number of Muslim Arab graduate students at some faculties is limited, the country of origin could be an identifier for some students. Therefore, I substituted country names in participants' quotes with words such as: my home country, Arab and Muslim.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of Arab Muslim graduate students at the University of British Columbia which allows for the understanding and description of the construction of their cultural and religious identities within the context of one university. Based on the literature review of this study, there continues to be a dearth of research regarding students of minority religions (e.g., Hindu, Sikh) and very little research explores the experience of students who do not identify with any religious background (e.g., atheists and ex-Muslims). Future research should include these groups of students to further understand how their experiences in relation to campus.

Because Arab and Muslim students are comprised of a large heterogenous group, this study fails to capture the nuances among the mixture of Arab Muslim students due to the

recruitment process. I recommend that future studies be recruited from a more diverse pool to include experiences of other Muslim students' groups such as Muslims who became atheists.

Furthermore, because space plays an integral role in the conceptual structure of this study, future research considering a spatial lens into the study of identity may utilize more grounding methods to enhance "space" into research. For example, Anderson (2004) suggested that walking with interviewees and "talking whilst walking" may harness the memories created by the participants in a specific place. It also can "harness place as an active trigger to prompt knowledge recollection and production" (p. 254). In addition, integrating visual methods into similar research may better situate such studies.

Furthermore, this study was restricted to explore the perceptions of students. Future research ought to explore other university personnel about their religious and cultural experiences as well as their understanding of cultural and religious experiences of students on campus. Hopkins (2011) noted that "students are only one set of actors who occupy the multiple spaces of the university campus" (167). Hence, future research should seek the perceptions of faculty members and administrators for more broad understandings.

Finally, this study was devoted to exploring the cultural and religious identities of Arab Muslim Graduate students. Because identities are more complex than the cultural and the religious and because Arab Muslim students are a heterogenous group, investigating intersectionality of Muslim identity is recommended for future research to entail racial, ethical, sexual, and gender dimensions beside the cultural and the religious.

5.6 Chapter Conclusion

Arab Muslim graduate students comprise a heterogeneous group who, despite their differences, share the religious and the cultural identities. The literature review shows that since 9/11, this group has been discriminated against mainly due to their cultural, religious, and ethnic identities. Such discrimination has resulted in less representation and integration of the culture of this group on-campus when compared to other minority groups. Furthermore, while this group has been studied extensively in relation to discrimination especially post 9/11, the scholarly literature shows scarcity in the exploration of cultural and religious identities of Arab Muslim graduate students. The gap in the literature is huge when considering a spatial/geographical angle in the research. This study attempted to fill this gap. However, further research is urgently needed especially in the milieu of current geopolitical dynamics. Geography and politics continue to impact higher education around the globe. For example, the very recent political conflict between Saudi Arabia and Canada has resulted in more than 15,000 Saudi students across Canadian higher education institutions being forced by the Saudi government to return to their home country. The continuity of the geopolitical incidents impacting education makes the integration of space when framing educational research more vital than ever.

The findings reveal that Arab Muslim students are like other minority groups in sharing similar needs in terms of culture and religion. University officials including international student practitioners, student affairs administrators, and educators are recommended to do more to facilitate the integration of Arab Muslim students and other marginalized groups on-campus with the goal of enhancing positive experiences for these students on-campus and to better foster internationalization.

Bibliography

- Abukhattala, I. (2004). *Educational and cultural adjustment of ten Arab Muslim students in Canadian university classrooms*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Al-Amrani, G. M. (2011). *Multiple literacies, fragmented identities: Arab students at American universities*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Alcoff, L. (1991). The problem of speaking for others. *Cultural Critique*, 20, 5-32.
- Ali, S. R., & Bagheri, E. (2009). Practical suggestions to accommodate the needs of Muslim students on campus. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2009(125), 47-54.
- Anderson, B. R. O. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Rev. and extend, 2nd ed.). New York; London, [Eng.]: Verso.
- Anderson, J. (2004). Talking whilst walking: A geographical archaeology of knowledge. *Area*, 36(3), 254-261.
- Archibald, D. (2004). *Placemaking, sites of cultural difference: The cultural production of space within a university construct*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE). (2015). About IE: Facts and figures. Retrieved November 10, 2015, from <http://www.cbie.ca/about-ie/facts-and-figures/>.
- Chan, Z. C., Fung, Y., & Chien, W. (2013). Bracketing in phenomenology: Only undertaken in the data collection and analysis process. *The Qualitative Report*, 18(30), 1-9. Retrieved May 15, 2018, from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol18/iss30/1>.
- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). (2016). #Welcome refugees: Key figures. Retrieved February 6, 2017 from <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/milestones.asp>.

- Cole, D., & Ahmadi, S. (2010). Reconsidering campus diversity: An examination of Muslim students' experiences. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 81(2), 121-139.
- Cowin, L. & Ouillet, P. (2014). Acadia park community needs assessments results report. Retrieved July 10, 2018 from http://bog2.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2014/01/4.7_2014.02_Acadia-Park-Report.pdf.
- Davison, H. R. (1960). Where is the Middle East? *Foreign Affairs*. 38, 665-675.
- Dey, F. (2012). *Islam on campus: Identity development of Muslim-American college students*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Dimandja, O. O. (2017). "We are not that different from you": *A phenomenological study of undergraduate Muslim international student campus experiences* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations.
- Ewing, K. P. (2008). *Being and belonging: Muslims in the united states since 9/11*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Fridolfsson, C. & Elander, I. (2013). Faith and place: Constructing Muslim identity in a secular Lutheran society. *Cultural Geographies*, 20(3), 319-337.
- Grbich, C. (2013). *Qualitative data analysis: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Grossberg, L. (1996). Identity and cultural studies: Is that all there is? In Hall, S., & Du Gay, P. (1996). *Questions of cultural identity*. Sage Publication.
- Hall, S. (1996a). The question of cultural identity. In Hall, S. Held, D. Hubert, D. Thompson, K. (Eds.). *Modernity: An introduction to modern societies*. (pp. 596-632). Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell.
- Hall, S. (1996b) Introduction: Who needs identity? In Hall, S., & Du Gay, P. (1996). *Questions of cultural identity*. Sage Publication.

- Hall, S. (1997). The local and the global. In McClintock, A., Mufti, A., & Shohat, E. (Ed). *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives* (pp. 173-187). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Harrington, K. D. (2013). *Community on campus: The role of physical space* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Hassan, A. & Jamaludin, N. S. (2010). Approaches and values in two gigantic educational philosophies: East and West. *Online Educational Research Journal*, 1(2). 1-15.
- Hilal, K. T., & Denman, B. D. (2013). Education as a tool for peace? the king Abdullah scholarship program and perceptions of Saudi Arabia and UAE post 9/11. *Higher Education Studies*, 3(2), 24-40.
- Hopkins, P. (2011). Towards critical geographies of the university campus: Understanding the contested experiences of Muslim students. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 36(1), 157-169.
- Inwood, J. F., & Martin, D. G. (2008). Whitewash: White privilege and racialized landscapes at The University of Georgia. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 9(4), 373---395.
- Jamal, A. A. (2017). Trump(ing) on Muslim women: The gendered side of islamophobia. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 13(3), 472-475.
- Kazanjian, V., & Laurence, P. (2007). The journey toward multi-faith community on campus: The religious and spiritual life program at Wellesley college. *Journal of College and Character*, 9(2), 4.
- Khozaei, F., Naidu, S., Khozaei, Z., & Salleh, N. A. (2015). An exploratory study of factors that affect the research progress of international PhD students from the middle east. *Education + Training*. 57(4), 448-460.

- Knight, J. (2013) The changing landscape of higher education internationalization – for better or worse? *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 17(3), 84-90.
- Koller, C. W. (2015). *The self-perception and campus experiences of traditional age female Muslim American students* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Lemke-Westcott, T., & Johnson, B. (2013). When culture and learning styles matter: A Canadian university with Middle-Eastern students. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 12(1), 66-84.
- Majumdar, S. (2010). *The quest for belonging: Arab Muslim ESOL students' (re)-construction of linguistic and cultural identities* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Marvasti, A. (2005). Being Middle Eastern American: Identity negotiation in the context of the war on terror. *Symbolic Interaction*, 28(4), 525-547.
- Mason, P. L., & Matella, A. (2014). Stigmatization and racial selection after September 11, 2001: Self-identity among Arab and Islamic Americans. *IZA Journal of Migration*, 3(1), 1-21.
- Mazawi, A. E., & Sultana, R. G. (2010). *World yearbook of education 2010: Education and the Arab 'world': Political projects, struggles, and geometries of power*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- McCutcheon, J. M., & Morrison, M. A. (2018). It's "like walking on broken glass": Pan-Canadian reflections on work–family conflict from psychology women faculty and graduate students. *Feminism & Psychology*, 28(2), 231-252.

- McGuire, K. M., Casanova, S., & Davis, C. H. F. (2016). "I'm a black female who happens to be Muslim": Multiple marginalities of an immigrant black Muslim woman on a predominantly white campus. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 85(3), 316-329.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Munandar, A. (2015). Indexicality of religious identity in Yale MSA e-communication. *Humaniora*, 27(3), 330-339.
- Nguyen, C., & Kebede, M. (2017). Immigrant students in the trump era: What we know and do not know. *Educational Policy*, 31(6), 716-742.
- Osama, A., & Andres, L. (2016). *Teaching and learning in hard and soft disciplines at North American universities*. The University of British Columbia. Retrieved August 2, 2018 from <http://hdl.handle.net/2429/59302>.
- Possamai, A, Dunn, K. Hopkins, P. Worthington L. & Amin, F. (2016) Muslim students' cultural and religious experiences in city, suburban and regional university campuses in NSW, Australia, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 38(6), 637-648.
- Qusti, E. S. (2016). *The Effect of 9/11 on the Lives of Arab Americans and Saudi Students Studying in the United States* (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Rahmath, S., Chambers, L., & Wakewich, P. (2016). Asserting citizenship: Muslim women's experiences with the hijab in Canada. *Women Studies International Forum*, 58, 34-40.
- Regmi, K. Naidoo, J. & Pilkington, P. (2010) Understanding the processes of translation and transliteration in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 9 (1), 16-26.

- Riggers-Piehl, T. A., & Lehman, K. J. (2016). Modeling the relationship between campus spiritual climate and the sense of belonging for Christian, Muslim, and Jewish students. *Religion & Education*, 43(3), 247-270.
- Rose-Redwood, C., & Rose-Redwood, R. (2017). Rethinking the politics of the international student experience in the age of trump. *Journal of International Students*, 7(3), I.
- Roulston, Kathryn. (2010). Considering quality in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Research*, 10(2), 199-228.
- Sandekian, R. E., Weddington, M., Birnbaum, M., & Keen, J. K. (2015). A narrative inquiry into academic experiences of female Saudi graduate students at a comprehensive doctoral university. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 19(4), 360-378.
- Schatz, V. G. (2008). "U.S. and them": Communicating international Muslim student identity at U.S. universities in the post-9/11 era (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Shammas, D. (2017). Underreporting Discrimination among Arab American and Muslim American Community College Students: Using Focus Groups to Unravel the Ambiguities within the Survey Data. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 11(1), 99-123.
- Springer, K. W., Parker, B. K., & Leviten-Reid, C. (2009). Making space for graduate student parents: *Practice and politics*. *Journal of Family Issues*, 30(4), 435-457.
- Staeheli, L. & Mitchell, D. (2009) Place, politics of. In *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*. Elsevier Science and Technology Books.
- Stanbrook, M. B. (2017). Trump travel ban means academics must strengthen, not sever, US ties. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 189(11), 420-421.

- Statistics Canada. (2017). Police-reported hate crime in Canada, 2015. Retrieved June 12, 2018, from <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14832-eng.htm>.
- Strange, C. & Banning, J. (2015). *Designing for learning: Creating campus environments for student success* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Sullivan, R. E. (2012). *Place of promise? queer students' negotiation of risk, danger, and safety at the University of British Columbia*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
- Temple, B., & Young, A. (2004). Qualitative research and translation dilemmas. *Qualitative Research*, 4(2), 161-178.
- The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Politics. (2013). Muslim students association of North America. (1st ed.). Oxford University Press.
- UBC students Services (2018). *Diversity on campus*. Retrieved July 4, 2018, from <https://students.ubc.ca/campus-life/diversity-campus>.
- Waters, J. (2017). Phenomenological research guidelines. *Capilano University*. Retrieved January 15, 2018 from <https://www.capilanou.ca/psychology/student-resources/research-guidelines/Phenomenological-Research-Guidelines/>
- World University Service of Canada (WUSC). (2016). The inspiring response to the global refugee crisis from Canadian universities, colleges and cegeps. Retrieved March 16, 2017 from <http://wusc.ca/en/inspiring-response-global-refugee-crisis-canadian-universities-colleges-and-c%C3%A9geps>

Appendix A

Recruitment Poster

Hello,

I am looking for 10 (5 male and 5 female) Arab Muslim full-time graduate students at their master's or PhD to take part in a study of

Spaces, discourses, and practices and the cultural identities of Arab Muslim Graduate students: voices from a Canadian university

الأماكن و الخطابات والممارسات بجامعة كندية و الهويات الثقافية لطلاب الدراسات العليا من المسلمين العرب

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to engage in a friendly conversation in a one-to-one interview with the researcher who is also an Arab Muslim graduate student. The purpose of this study is to give voice to Arab Muslim students at UBC by determining the role the university system plays in shaping, reshaping, and transforming our sense of cultural identity.

Your participation would involve (1) session
of which is approximately (1) hours.

As part of the interview I invite you for lunch/coffee at the place of your choice “on-campus”

**To participate in this study, please click the link below
to fill up the form:**

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8GWPL63>

For more information about this study, you may contact:

Prof. Lesley Andres *Professor, Department of Educational Studies, UBC*
Or

Bayan Qutub *MA Student, Department of Educational Studies, UBC*

Appendix B

Consent Form



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Department of Educational Studies

Faculty of Education
Education Centre at Ponderosa Commons
6445 University Boulevard
Vancouver B.C. V6T 1Z2
CANADA

Tel: 604-822-5374

Fax: 604-822-4244

Web: <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca>

“Consent Form”

Spaces, discourses, and practices (de)constructing cultural identity of Arab Muslim

Graduate students: voices from a Canadian university

I. STUDY TEAM

Principal Investigator: Prof. Lesley Andres,
Professor, Department of Educational Studies, UBC

Co- Investigator: Bayan Qutub,
MA Student, Department of Educational Studies, UBC

This research is for the fulfilments of a master’s degree. The research will be a public document in the form of a thesis. Once finished, there will be a public access to the document mainly through UBC Circle.

II. INVITATION AND STUDY PURPOSE

We want to learn more about how to help graduate students who are Muslim and Arabs. This study will give voice to Arab Muslim graduate students at UBC to talk about their experiences in the university. Particularly, we want to learn about the influence that the

university has on their understanding of themselves and their culture. We want to learn more about how the spaces, discourses, and practices of the university affect these students' recognition of themselves as Muslims and Arabs.

III. STUDY PROCEDURES

If you decide to take part in this research study, you will be asked to get engaged in a friendly conversation in a one to one interview with the researcher who is also an Arab Muslim graduate student. The interview will be conducted in the language of your preference: Arabic or English. The interview will take place on campus. Your participation would involve (1) session of which is approximately (1) hours. During the interview, an audio recording will be involved. Two audio recorders will be used to record the interview. The recording will be used only for this research purpose. It will be password protected and stored on encrypted computers and/or secure servers accessible only to members of the research team.

After the interview, there might be an extra meeting if there is a need for one.

In addition, a follow up contact will be launched by researcher once the transcription and analysis is ready. This contact will be most likely through email and aims for checking up with you the appropriateness of meanings and interpretation of quotes, analysis, and translation. This offers you an opportunity to add or edit.

IV. STUDY RESULTS

The results of this study will be reported in a Master thesis and will also be published in journal articles and books and might be shared in a conference.

The results of the study will also be sent to you through email.

V. POTENTIAL RISKS OF THE STUDY

As you are a graduate student at UBC, we assume that you will be an excellent English language user.

However, because English is not your first language, you may prefer to converse in Arabic. Discussing one's self, one's feelings, one's own culture, and sense of identity are sensitive topics that the use of English in such discussion might impose a different context than when discussing in Arabic.

We do not think there is anything in this study that could harm you or be bad for you. Please let the researcher know if you have any concerns regarding the questions we ask.

If some of the questions we ask may seem sensitive or personal, you do not have to answer any question if you do not want to.

VI. POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

This research will give voice to Arab Muslim Students studying at UBC.

Arab Muslim students are among several minority groups in Canada who may lack a sense of understanding or sometimes recognition from the dominant culture. This research attempts to bring students' voices to university's policy makers and aims to contribute to positive changes in the future.

VII. CONFIDENTIALITY

Your confidentiality will be respected.

All documents will be identified only by pseudonyms of participants and kept in a locked filing cabinet.

Subjects will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study rather, pseudonyms will be used.

VIII. PAYMENT

We will not pay you for the time you take to be in this study. However, we will pay the cost of the coffee/food ordered throughout the interview.

IX. CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you, please contact Professor Andres. Her telephone number is listed at the top of the first page of this form.

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

XI. PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND SIGNATURE PAGE

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to withdraw of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact on yourself as a student or as a participant in other studies.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

Participant Signature

Date

Printed Name of the Participant signing above

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Background questions:

1. How long have you been in Canada?
2. What is your discipline and program of study?
3. In which year of study are you?
4. Why did you choose to study at UBC?
5. How old are you?
6. Are you here by your family or by yourself? Expand on that if possible.
7. Where do you live (on-campus/off-campus)? And what do you think of it?
8. What does your study environment look like (lab, classes, study on/off campus)?

Main questions:

9. What were your expectations before coming to Canada?
10. How did you feel coming from your culture to the Canadian culture?
11. Do you remember a situation, a conversation, or any incident that made you feel comfortable/not comfortable?
12. How would you describe your cultural identity?
13. Describe your sense of belonging when you first arrived.
14. Describe your sense of belonging today?
15. How do you describe the change if existed?
16. Do you think that your sense of understanding of yourself being a Muslim Arab changed from what it was when you first arrived Canada? In what ways (if either yes or no)?
17. How does being a woman/man may affect your identity as a Muslim Arab student?
18. How has this changed since you commenced studies at UBC?
19. Why do you think it (didn't) change?

20. Do you remember an incident you faced at the university that may affect your sense of cultural identity?
21. Describe how does such an experience change the way you perceive your cultural identity?
22. Have you ever thought that the university played a role in changing your sense of cultural identity?

Detailed questions:

23. Are there spaces at the university you feel more acceptable and/or comfortable as a Muslim Arab than others?
24. Have you ever had a syllabus, a class discussion or content, or a university policy that challenged your identity as a Muslim Arab student?
25. Were you ever been involved in any practice related to the university that either challenged or embraced your identity as an Arab Muslim student? Expand on that if yes please.

Concluding questions:

26. Do you have any final thoughts on the role the university play in shaping the sense of cultural identity for Arab Muslim graduate students?
27. If you were a university decision maker, what would you change in regards to Arab Muslim students?
28. Anything else you would like to say or ask?

أسئلة عامة:

1. منذ متى و أنت في كندا؟
2. ما هو تخصصك الأكاديمي ؟
3. في أي سنة دراسية أنت الآن؟
4. لم اخترت الدراسة في اليو بي سي؟
5. كم عمرك؟
6. هل انت هنا بمفردك أم لديك عائلة؟ مع الشرح تكملاً.
7. هل تقطن بسكن الجامعة أم خارجها؟ وكيف تجد ذلك.
8. صف لي طبيعة الجو الدراسي (معمل- صفوف دراسية- تدرس بداخل الحرم الجامعي- أم خارجه)؟

الأسئلة الرئيسية:

9. ما هي توقعاتك الأولى عن الجامعة قبل وصولك إلى كندا؟ اختلاف الثقافتين الاحترام و الكهنوت
10. كيف كان شعورك عندما وصولك الأول هنا خصوصاً أنك قدمت من ثقافة تختلف عن الثقافة الكندية؟
11. هل تذكر موقف، محادثة، أو أي حدث في البدايات جعلك تشعر بالارتياح أو بعدم الارتياح؟
12. كيف تصف هويتك الثقافية؟
13. صف لي شعورك بالانتماء عند قدومك الأول لكندا.
14. صف لي شعورك بالانتماء حالياً.
15. كيف تصف التغيير؟ في حال كان هناك تغيير.
16. هل تعتقد بأن فهمك لذاتك كعربي مسلم قد تغير عما كان عند وصولك الأول إلى كندا؟ وكيف ذلك (في حالة الإجابة بنعم أو لا)؟
17. كيف ترى أن كونك رجل/امرأة قد يؤثر على هويتك كطالب مسلم عربي؟

18. كيف تغيرت نظرتك في هذا الموضوع عندما بدأت دراستك في اليو بي سي؟

19. لماذا ترى أن نظرتك تغيرت أو لم تتغير؟

20. هل سبق و حصل لك موقف في الجامعة أثر على شعورك بالانتماء لهويتك الثقافية؟

21. كيف يمكن لموقف ما أن يغير طريقة نظرتك لهويتك الثقافية؟

22. هل سبق وأن فكرت في الجامعة كعامل مؤثر في تغيير نظرتك في هويتك الثقافية؟

أسئلة تفصيلية:

23. كطالب مسلم عربي هل تجد أماكن في الجامعة تشعر فيها بارتياح وقبول من الآخرين أكثر من غيرها؟

24. هل سبق وواجهت سياسة في الجامعة أو نقاش خلال صف دراسي أو محتوى في مقرر دراسي وتحدثت هويتك

الثقافية كعربي مسلم؟

25. هل سبق و شاركت في أي نشاط متعلق بالجامعة اعترض أو عزز هويتك الثقافية كمسلم عربي؟ مع الشرح لطفاً

لو نعم.

أسئلة ختامية:

26. ماذا تود أن تضيف حول دور الجامعة في تشكيل الهوية الثقافية لطلاب الدراسات العليا من المسلمين العرب؟

27. لو كنت مسؤول في الجامعة فمالذي ستغيره بخصوص الطلاب المسلمين العرب؟

28. هل تود أن تضيف شيئاً أو أن تطرح سؤالاً أخيراً؟