

(re)Interpretation of Politics of Victimhood Through Subtle Acts of Resistance

Narratives of the Everyday Life of a Shi'i Muslim Community Diaspora in BC

by

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ABSTRACT

Based on interviews with members of a Shi'i Muslim community in Vancouver, British Columbia, this dissertation explores the politics of victimhood and subtle acts of resistance and agency in their everyday life in Canada. Shi'i Muslims who participated in this research reference the historical narrative of Hussein which guides their self-understanding as a group. As I will argue, this narrative has multiple meanings and can be understood as a vehicle for personal and community transformation. Insistence on remembering the story of Hussein, its representation, perception and symbolism creates a capacity for agency where remembrance is political and victimhood, a motivating force. In this study, I shed light on this aspect of the Shi'i identity in the diaspora, as I argue that amidst the mourning and the remembrance of the story of Hussein, agency and resistance take shape, sometimes in the most subtle forms in the everyday. In exploring the connection between resistance and identity of members of this diasporic community, I demonstrate that acts of resistance, no matter how small and subtle, when motivated by religious convictions, inevitably create religio-political identities. As such, these identities insist on active citizenship as a way to reject (re)victimization and marginalization as they seek equal recognition and equal participation as a minority within a minority in Canada. I illustrate this through stories gathered from the everyday lives of the participants in this study.

LAY SUMMARY

Based on interviews with nine members of a Shi'i Muslim community in Vancouver, British Columbia and informed by their experiences as a minority within a minority in Canada, this dissertation explores how victimhood is defined by the participants in the study; specifically, for this particular community whose sense of identity is imbedded in a religious and historical narrative, rooted in victimhood and marginalization. Through their narratives, this dissertation aims to explore the sense of double-marginalization they grapple with in the diaspora; Islamophobia in general and the anti-Shi'i sentiment in particular. This dissertation seeks to unfold how the latter form of marginalization is resisted by this community through subtle acts of resistance and agency that is rooted in their understanding of the story of Karbala which inspires their community work. This dissertation aims to examine what motivates and drive that sense of resistance and agency amidst marginalization.

PREFACE

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Waged Jafer. The fieldwork (interviews) was covered by UBC Ethics Certificate number H16-01104.

Note on style:

1. The words and the names in Arabic have been italicized. Translations are my own for slogans in Arabic, placed in brackets in-text.

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GLOSSARY

-Ahlul-Bayt: The infallible Ahlul-Bayt (people of the house) as referred to them by the Shi'i Muslims, are the family of the Prophet Muhammed; descendants of his daughter Fatimah and her husband Ali.

-Ashura: The Tenth day of month of Muharram (the first month of Islamic Calendar); it also means tenth in Arabic.

-Battle of Karbala: [10th of Muharram, AH 61] , a historical battle in which a small party led by Hussein, and 72 of companions was massacred by an army sent by the Umayyad caliph Yazid. Among the Shi'i Muslims the 10th of Muharram (Ashura) became an annual holy day of public mourning.

-Hussein: the grandson of Prophet Muhammed and the third Imam for Shi'i Twelvers.

-Karbala: a city in central Iraq.

-Madhlumiya: The condition of having been wronged or being subjected to injustice and oppression. Madhlumiya is the Arabic word and Mazlumiya is a Persian version of the same concept and both are used interchangeably.

-Muharam: The first month of the Islamic (lunar) calendar.

-Shi'i Twelvers: Largest branch of Shi'i Islam (approximately 85% of all Shi'i with an estimate of 200-220 million Twelvers) making them the second largest Muslim community after Sunni Muslims. Shi'i Muslims hold the believe that the twelve imams (Ahlul-Bayt) beginning with Ali, are the divinely ordained leaders who are the rightful spiritual and political successor of Muhammed.

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DEDICATION

To Mama and Baba- The kindest two, who *never stop giving of themselves in countless ways.*

Thank you for teaching me the most important lessons in life - If I've done anything right in my life – *it's because of you.*

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This interdisciplinary dissertation considers the lived experience of nine individuals who self-identify as Shi'i Muslims who are all members of a particular Shi'i Muslim community centre in Vancouver, British Columbia (BC). This research carefully explores the lived experiences of these narrators as they define their sense of identity and belonging along with the challenges they face as a *minority within a minority*¹ in Canada. It finds that they rely on a particular spiritual religious narrative, the story of Karbala², which is imbedded within Shi'ism, to (re)construct their social identity as they aim to shift and position themselves from Shi'i Muslims in Canada to Shi'i Muslim Canadians. This study aims to explore how in the midst of the sense of marginalization that they speak of, agency and resistance take shape, in the *most subtle forms* in their everyday as they seek equal recognition and active citizenship in Canada.

In this introductory chapter I seek to do three things. First to provide both my motivation and positionality as a Shi'i Muslim scholar in Canada to fill a gap in literature about the lived experiences of members of this *minority within a minority* community; who, based on their own personal experiences, have been sidelined and marginalized due to their multi-layered identities. This work has emerged from my need to find appropriate answers to the questions about my own sense of belonging and personal experiences of marginalization and alienation I have experienced growing up as a Shi'i Muslim in Canada. To examine these questions as a scholar I engage with academic literature that bears on these questions and

¹ I was first introduced to this term after reading an edited volume by Avigail Eisenberg and Jeff Spinner-Halev, *Minorities within Minorities: Equality, Rights and Diversity*: a volume that explores minority rights by focusing on conflicts that arise within minority groups and the question of what happens to individuals within groups who find themselves both discriminated against by the larger society and discriminated against within their own community. I will discuss this literature in more detail later.

² Karbala is a city in central Iraq. It is considered as one of the Shi'i Muslims foremost holy cities.

qualitative interviews in order to fill the gap within this literature. Secondly, I set out my research questions, the theoretical framing and method I adopt to answer those questions. Thirdly, I describe the role played by the narratives of the nine participants in this study who were interviewed in depth. Lastly, I discuss the need and the importance of the study and a chapter by chapter summary of the thesis.

1.1 Motivation and Positioning:

There is a yearly event, for Shi'i³ Muslims everywhere, that is most comparable to what Christmas season is like for Christians and indeed much of the Canadian society, except ours is not a happy and a festive one but a period of deep reflection, retelling of a story, remembrance and grief, wrapped in sadness and heavy heartedness. I remember, as a young girl, those ten nights meant going to a nearby mosque and that involved a gathering of people, dressed in black- the colour of grief- to symbolize loss- remembrance and 'never forgetting'. Every night, a story was told, by a religious speaker, a storyteller in this case, in a sequel form, ten episodes, for ten nights and on the final day the entire story, a finale of some sort, detailed, sorrowful and heartbreaking and some parts read like poetry, beautiful, with rhythm. A sermon is always given prior to the story by a religious scholar, who carefully crafts the same historical story with relevant themes to the politics of the time.

Going back to the same reference I made at the very beginning here referencing Christmas, the story I am referring to is also similar to a birth story of Christ as it's retold or sung by choir in a church on Christmas Eve. However, ours was a sad version of that, mourning the death of a man, who is known as "Hussein⁴", the 'master of martyrs' known to Shi'i Muslims everywhere. Just as in the story of Christ is retold every year with same intensity over

³ Throughout this dissertation, any references to Shi'i Islam should be understood as referring to Shi'i Twelvers.

⁴ Hussein is the grandson of Prophet Muhammed and the third Imam for *Shi'i Twelvers*.

time, the story of Hussein was told in the same manner, as if it had taken place in that very moment. As a young girl, to me, this was a story based on real events, took place more than a thousand years ago and for some reason it never got old but we all grew older with it. I never really understood why we did the exact same thing every year, why we heard the very same story, its details the very same way, year after year.

As a young girl, those ten days of mourning were all about going to mosque, hearing a story, dressing in black and witnessing adults mourning and reflecting on a “message” that was embedded within the story. Whether the event was meant to be a celebration of victimhood or condemnation of injustice was unclear to me as a child, but I knew, and I was told even in children’s version of the same story that injustice was wrong and if you stand up to it you are remembered forever, just as Hussein did. That was, in its simplest form, my understating of the story of Hussein as a child. The children’s version of the story also meant we had to learn about the other themes that were all tied to the story of Hussein, the moral teachings and lessons from Karbala that was meant to show us how to lead a life of a good, pious Muslim. My favourite quote in those sessions was a quote by Mahatma Gandhi that read “I learnt from Hussein how to achieve victory while being oppressed⁵”. The thought of being oppressed yet victorious was intriguing to me as a child, how could one be both at the same time?

If sense of self and identity is crafted over time, Shi’i Muslims’ sense of self is crafted around this event, this story and its remembrance. Here I am, as an adult, as a scholar, many years later, in Canada, thousands of miles away from where I grew up as a child, still partaking in the same gathering every year, listening to the same story being narrated with the same intensity as if it took place recently. Nothing has changed in the plot of the story, the story

⁵ To this day, this quote is circulated very commonly within Shi’i Islam resources online and in print.

remains the same, but the sermons have taken on an even more political tone and the story remains as the point of reference. My perception of the story has changed, my appreciation still the same- I have come to understand the story in relation to the politics of the day and as a symbol; I have learned that it is much more than a story, it is a call for action, insistence on remembrance and persistence to be and that remembrance is a political act, in need of recognition and further inquiry.

As a researcher, I have always found the words of Daniel Druckman, a conflict resolution scholar, on the purpose of conducting research quite compelling. He argues that the most important contributions are more likely to result from a topic where there is “genuine curiosity and excitement” (Druckman & Keeter, 2005, p. 14). For me, this particular research serves as a genuine attempt to explore the questions I have particularly those that relate to the multiple-layers of my own religious identity; a Shi’i Muslim woman in Canada. How I understand my sense of self has always been fragmented; a baggage full of questions surrounding the significance and the relation of narratives, remembrance, agency, victimhood and action that are embedded in the foundation of my Shi’i Muslim identity. This “genuine curiosity” stems from the hope of being able to connect these fragmented components and understand them in a coherent sense in an attempt to discover my storied self. The “excitement” on the other hand, stems from committing myself to fill this particular gap in literature that exists when it comes to understanding the multi-layered identities of Shi’i Muslims especially in Canada and explore the notion of ‘victimhood’ – a topic that has received considerable attention amongst scholars of identity politics (Bernstein, 2005; Brown, 1995; Jacoby, 2015; Tully, 2003) in a non-western comparative context.

This work emerged from my need to make sense of the alienation and disempowerment (Hill Collins, 1986) that I had faced in my own personal life as a Shi'i Muslim specifically and as a Muslim more broadly in Canada. During my undergraduate studies in Ottawa, there were two student organized Islamic clubs, one was the Muslims Student Association (MSA) which was the main club that all Muslim students, from all ethnic and cultural background could voluntarily join. The Shi'i Muslim students similarly had their own club and it was the Muslim Student Federation (MSF), which aimed at creating a sense of belonging for all Shi'i students regardless of their ethnic or cultural background. During my second year, I remember I attended the initial meet and greet organized by the Muslim Student Association (MSA) at the beginning of the academic year, to discuss and plan the events of that particular year. As my friend and I walked into the small hall the event was held in, the president of the club at the time, called us out from the back end of the room and asked us to leave. He said that he was aware we were also members of the Muslim Student Federation (MSF) and that we did not belong there. I remember that day vividly, the embarrassment and the humiliation, and the sense of disempowerment that came with it. My friend and I left the hall, not knowing what the appropriate thing to do was. Our first reaction was disbelief; I remember how we stared at each other and kept asking 'why'? We blamed ourselves for going, we told ourselves we did not belong there, we were not welcomed because we were the 'other' kinds of Muslims.

Just like that, we engaged in self-blame because we saw ourselves in a "us" and "them" category, there was no need to make a big deal of it, we told ourselves, we made a mistake going there, that 'it was our fault'. We became more active in the other club, the smaller one, the one that we 'really' belonged to. Tension between the MSA and MSF became more visible year after year, particularly in the prayer room between members, those tensions existed and

the best possible way to avoid them was for each club to avoid the other. Such tensions on university campuses are not new. Recently, a study conducted in March of 2019 on Shi'i activism on a university campus in the UK, highlighted the tension that exists among Shi'i Muslims and Sunni Muslims students in Britain (Degli Esposti, 2018). This sense of marginalization that I personally encountered as a young university student continued to have significant impact on how I perceive my sense of identity and belonging as a Shi'i Muslim in Canada. At the same time and equally important, I also perceived my sense of identity and belonging as a person of colour and as a Muslim in Canada as I experienced, first-hand, the pain of being discriminated against in the form of name calling and harassment which always intends to humiliate and disempower the one on the receiving end. I often think and remember the number of cases I have experienced being called a "terrorist" or asked, "to go back to my country". These experiences, strongly etched in my memory, along with the broader context of how Muslims as a whole are often constructed in popular culture contribute to how I perceive and understand my identity, my own story which is the "collection of the figures and events that belong to one's life story. It brings together one's prior selves and images of significant others without which the story cannot be completely told" (Brady, 1990, p. 45).

Shi'i diasporic experiences of double minority status, in recent years, have been a topic of interest for many scholars in different parts of the world where there reside a Shi'i Muslim population as *a minority within a minority*. Among the many recent studies are for instance the study of Shi'is in Ireland who refer to their own experiences of marginalization to seek public recognition as the moderate Muslims (Scharbrodt, 2011); Shi'is in Sweden who have indicated a sense of threat as a minority in the face of the rise of extremist Sunni Muslims groups (Olsson, 2017); the study of the relationship between Islamophobia and 'Shiaphobia' in the case of

young British Iraqi Shi'is (Ali, 2019); the public gathering of the Shi'i Muslims in Edinburgh, as they remember Karbala, which aims to highlight the existence of the Shi'i minority among the Muslim majority (Alibhai, 2018); and an in-depth study of Shi'i students activism on a British university campus (Degli Esposti & Scott-Baumann, 2019). These recent studies with their particular interest in Shi'i diasporic communities could be seen as a positive step forward that is inclusive of minority experiences⁶ that has been absent in literature.

As I began researching what kinds of studies have focused on particularly the Shi'i diaspora I was able to come across a significant number of recent studies that were done in relation to the Shi'i identity formation across Europe (Ali, 2019; Alibhai, 2018; Bøe & Flakerud, 2017; Chatziprokopiou, Marios, Hatziporkopiou, 2017; Degli Esposti, 2018; Scharbrodt, 2018; Shanneik, 2015); United States (Sachedina, 1994; Liyakat Takim, 2018; Liyakatali Takim, 2009); Australia (Tabar, 2003) but no such research in Canada. This gap in literature was also a significant reason why I wanted to conduct this research and I hope this dissertation will serve to help fill that gap. During my MA in conflict resolution and peace studies, I travelled to Baghdad and Beirut to conduct my fieldwork as I worked on developing a framework for reconciliation between Shi'i Muslims and Sunni Muslims based on religious leaders' engagement in the peace process. In that work, I specifically focused on the problematic issue that existed in both Shi'i and Sunni literature of 'othering' which fed into the escalation of tension amongst them in the region, particularly following the war in

⁶ On the issue of religious minority experiences, it is safe to argue that social discrimination, even in scholarship impacts religious minorities. For instances, one interesting case that is in need of further research is the case of Sunni communities in Iran, who are a minority in a Shi'i-majority country. There is of course not much research done on this particular community as a minority within a Shi'i majority country which is demonstrated by the gap in literature on the relationship between Shi'i – Sunni Muslims in Iran (Ameli & Molaei, 2012). A study that looked at religious affiliation and intercultural sensitivity in Iran, from 2010, highlighted how as a religious minority, the Sunni Muslims in Iran had to work much harder to preserve their religious identity as they protect their rituals, opinions and custom against a Shi'i majority. The lack of research on this particular community, highlights the problematic issue of social discrimination when it comes to religious minority groups.

Iraq in 2003. In that research I explored the degree to which the de-escalation of such tensions based on the framework of human identity needs could be a possibility. After completing my research, I began to think about the need for something similar here in Canada, the place I call home. My motivation to start this research is a combination of two important matters. One is the personal experiences of my own multi-layered identity, particularly those that have left me with a heavy sense of marginalization and othering, as a Shi'i Muslim in Canada, as I refuse to occupy a position of a victim. The other reason is based on the gap that I noticed here, that minority diasporic identities particularly Shi'i minority groups are complex, so a thorough study of how such diasporic identities are shaped, what influences them, how are they constructed and reconstructed as a diaspora in Canada is a significant contribution to the literature on identity politics and multiculturalism.

1.2 Positionality in Research: My 'Insider' and 'Outsider' Position

"Insiders and Outsiders in the domain of knowledge, unite. You have nothing to lose but your claims. You have a world of understanding to win." (Merton, 1972, p.44)

The positionality and the membership of the researcher in qualitative research, specifically between the insider and outsider position has been a subject of interest for many scholars in various fields. Working with one's own community or belonging to the same group or population as one's research participants can be both challenging and rewarding at the same time. In this context, insider research happens when researchers conduct research with a population of which they are also members, which means the researcher shares an identity with the participants of the study (Asselin, 2003). Among the positive aspects of being an insider is the greater ease of access to the community one researches, along with having the awareness of the nuances of the culture and customs which allows the honouring of their cultural norms and values (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Merriam et al., 2001; Yakushko,

Badiee, Mallory, & Wang, 2011). Particularly, in light of shared experiences of marginalization⁷, a key theme in this study, allows for a much more open dialogue among the member of the community being researched (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Being an insider allows researchers a more complete and rapid acceptance by their participants. Therefore participants are more open with researchers so there may be a greater depth to the data gathered (Asselin, 2003; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Kanuha, 2000).

In fact, one of the participants of this research study told me he was especially interested and drawn to my research because he knew a Shi'i Muslim was conducting this research. As a researcher, I am aware that my position as a Shi'i Muslim was also a contributing factor that provided a level of trust and openness that would have not likely been present otherwise (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) as participants in such cases “might be more willing to share their experiences because there is an assumption of understanding and an assumption of shared distinctiveness; it is as if they feel ‘you are one of us and it is us versus them’ (as those on the outside who don’t understand)”(Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p.58). As I go more in depth in the next chapters when I share the stories of the participants in this research, there are intricate and personal details that they shared with me because of this very reason and I will highlight those instances in more depth in the next chapters. Being an insider researcher of course is not devoid of certain challenges and potential problems. Various scholars have identified the challenge as the struggle with the ‘role conflict’ if the researchers

⁷ Mags Crean, who has examined the methodological issues that are raised for minority scholars as they conduct research with an “insider-outsider position”, argues that social class, care and gender along with a particular positioning have a significant role in the data collection and analysis. This could pose a particular challenge for minority scholars, beyond personal and professional consideration of course, but also political levels if they are researching inequality. She further explains that, what is needed is for those particular positionings to be managed through a reflexive practice and dialogue on a personal and professional level and an individual commitment in the form of innovative research, where reflective practice, dialogue and action are established institutionally as well (Crean, 2018).

find themselves caught between a dual role, ‘loyalty tugs’ and ‘behavioural claims’ (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) which can result in ‘role confusion’. This occurs when the researcher responds to the participants or analyses the data from a perspective other than that of a researcher (Asselin, 2003) although, this issue of ‘role confusion’ could occur in any research but the risk could potentially be higher when the researcher is familiar with the research or the participants through a role other than of a researcher. This potential risk could also be mitigated if the researcher could step back from the data collection and “keeps notes on thoughts, feelings and responses to observations and interview and re-read these notes periodically”(Asselin, 2003, p. 102). As a researcher, and a professional and a practitioner in my role as mediator in the field of conflict resolution, in addition to being a certified third party neutral expert, those skills have also assisted me significantly in this process of taking a step back and examining my role as a researcher to avoid this ‘role confusion’ in this study⁸. Although it is important to pay closer attention to such potential risks when conducting a research, it is also important to remember that being a “member of the group being studied does not unduly influence the process in the negative way. Detailed reflection on the subjective research process, with close awareness of one’s own personal biases and perspective might well reduce the potential concerns associated with insider membership”(Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p.59). In their article, *The space between: On*

⁸ In her work, “Insider or outsider, Both or Neither: Some Dilemmas of Interviewing in Cross Cultural Settings”, on the topic of insider-outsider position in qualitative research, Beverley Mullings, who is an economic geographer, argues that inter-cultural perceptions, interactions and representations can also influence the field work process, which ultimately affect the interpretations and writing of the final text. She argues that in the process of exchange between interviewer and the interviewee there tends to be a convergence of positionalities, and it is in this specific moment where the researcher’s positionality could also evoke stereotypes which in return could influence the feelings and opinions of the interviewee which is exactly how a researcher seeks to create spaces for trust. She also argues that there will be times where there are some aspects of differences and uncertainties and it is important to recognize and name those instances of difference both as a way to establishing rigor in the research process as well as shifting the authority of the author in the text (Mullings, 1999).

being an Insider- Outsider in Qualitative Research, Sonya Dwyer and Jennifer Buckle make a compelling argument in defense of the insider researcher by arguing that ultimately “the core ingredient is not insider or outsider status but an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in their experience of one’s research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience”(Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p.59). They argue that “as qualitative researchers we are not separate from the study, with limited contact with our participants. Instead, we are firmly in all aspects of the research process and essential to it. The stories of participants are immediate and real to us; individual voices are not lost in a pool of numbers. We carry these individuals with us as we work with the transcripts. The words, representing experiences, are clear and lasting. We cannot retreat to a distant “researcher” role”(Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 61). Another important element to consider is that insider researchers are native to the setting and therefore their insights are from the lived experiences and this in itself a distinctive contribution to the knowledge creation (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

As I consider my insider position in this research, I seek something more, beyond the mission of self-discovery, I want more analysis, more knowledge, more understanding of others whose life experiences were similar to mine. At times I also considered my outsider position, as an Arab Shi’i Muslim, my ethnicity as an Arab was different from the research participants I interviewed who are non-Arab Shi’i Muslims, a population that I was not very familiar with prior to this research. My insider position was in relation to the religious identity of the participants of my study, the multiplicity of perspective is intriguing and new to me as a researcher therefore in a sense I occupied a place as an insider and an outsider. This issue, on several occasions, made me think of the question “what is it that an insider is

insider of?”(Merriam et al., 2001, p.411) a question one must ask specifically with respect to the multiplicity of social and cultural characteristic of the group one researches as “positionality is determined by where one stands in relation to others”(Merriam et al., 2001, p.411) because just by being a member of a group being studied is not sufficient to be able to know the experience of that group (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) as “knowing an experience requires more than simply having it; knowing implies being able to identify, describe, and explain”(Fay, 1996, p.20) those experiences, which is precisely what I aiming to do in this research.

1.3 Purpose and Research Questions

This study examines the lived experiences of nine self-identifying Shi’i Twelvers who are all members of a Shi’i community centre located in BC, Canada. The participants of this study narrate their lived experiences of victimhood and marginalization not only in their home countries prior to immigrating to Canada, but also their sense of alienation and marginalization that they have encountered here in Canada, specifically as a minority within a minority. In response to such experience of alienation, they articulate the means they have taken to resist this sense of (re)victimization here in Canada through their collective community work which is inspired by the narrative of Karbala and how their engagement with this particular historical narrative has created a sense of agency in the face of all forces that seek to marginalize and alienate them. This study seeks to contribute to the knowledge base regarding the following two overarching areas of inquiry:

1. In the face of double marginalization, rise of Islamophobia in general and anti-Shi’i sentiments from the larger Muslim community more specifically, how do members of this minority within a minority community, respond, organize and think of

themselves in their daily lives? And in that light, how do they define their sense of identity?

2. When and if they resist that sense of marginalization, what is the source of their mobilization and how do they create a sense of agency as a minority within a minority, specifically as Shi'i Muslims in Canada? Specifically, how do they redeploy the notion of Karbala and victimhood to be a form of resistance to injustice and misrecognition and tool for change?

My aim is to shed a special light on how the latter form marginalization is resisted by this community and what motivates and drives that sense of resistance. In this particular research, I will advance the argument that self-understanding for Shi'i Muslims, particularly for the participants in this study, is grounded in a particular narrative which may appear to be that of victimhood but as I shall argue ought to be viewed as having multiple meanings and this narrative is a vehicle for personal and community transformation. Insistence on remembering the historical narrative of Hussein, its representation, perception and symbolism creates a capacity for agency where remembrance is political and victimhood a motivating force. In this study I aim to shed light on this aspect of the Shi'i identity in the diaspora, as I argue that amidst the mourning and the remembrance of the story of Hussein, agency and resistance take shape, sometimes in the most subtle forms; in their everyday. In exploring the connection between resistance and identity of this particular diasporic community, I will demonstrate that acts of resistance, no matter how small and subtle, are motivated by religious convictions, which create religio-political identities that insist on active citizenship as a way to reject victimization and marginalization as they seek equal recognition and equal

participation as a minority within a minority in Canada. I intend to illustrate this through the gathered everyday stories of participants in my study, whom I will introduce shortly.

1.4 Sunni Muslims and Shi'i Muslims: Historical Context, National Politics and Sectarianization

In order to explore the Shi'i identity in the diaspora, it is of utmost importance to briefly provide a historical context that informs the Shi'i identity from a Shi'i Muslim historical perspective. Shi'i Muslim identity particularly the Shi'i Twelver is imbedded in devotion (Al-Muzaffar, 1982) and allegiance (Schubel, 2006) to Muhammad and the *Ahlul-Bayt*.⁹ Shi'i Twelvers constitute the largest branch of Shi'i Islam with approximately 85% of all Shi'i Muslims, making them the second largest Muslims community after Sunni Muslims. They hold the belief that the twelve imams beginning with Ali, Muhammed cousin, are the divinely ordained leaders who are the rightful spiritual and political successor of Muhammed. The twelve Imams within the Shi'i theology are exemplary and are chosen by divine decree who rule over the community with justice, making them along with Muhammed and his only daughter the infallible *Ahlul-Bayt* (people of the house) who are models for human behaviour, piety, conduct and justice. (Al-Muzaffar, 1982; Schubel, 2006; Tabar, 2003). This devotion and allegiance for the Shi'i Muslims continues on since the very first intra-religious conflict among Muslims that occurred right after death of Muhammed over the rightful successor, who is within the Shi'i historical and theological narrative was the first imam and the cousin of Muhammed, Ali; that event according to the Shi'i narratives marked the very first act of 'injustice' (Dabashi, 2011) that was committed in a religio-political sense.

⁹ The infallible Ahlul-Bayt (people of the house) as referred to them by the Shi'i Muslims, are the family of the Prophet Muḥammad, particularly his daughter Fāṭimah, her husband 'Alī (who was also Muḥammad's cousin), and their descendants.

Although the debate over succession has been always linked to the historical divide between the Sunni Muslims and Shi'i Muslims it is not accurate to claim that the divide today, particularly in the Middle East is the result of that historic event as that cannot explain the political instability and sectarian tension that has currently engulfed the Arab-Islamic world today, specifically the turmoil in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and beyond. In a rich and analytical piece, *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East*, Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, describe the term sectarianization as “an active process shaped by political actors operating within specific contexts, pursuing political goal that involve the mobilization of popular sentiments around particular identity makers” adding to that they argue “class dynamics, fragile states, and geopolitical rivalries also shape the sectarianization process”(Hashemi & Postel, 2017, p.3). In their analysis, they argue that political authoritarianism in the region, and not the theological, historical divide is a critical factor in the sectarianization process. They argue that authoritarian regimes have deliberately manipulated sectarian identities as a mean to distract and deflect demands for political change from the public (Hashemi & Postel, 2017). To that end, this authoritarian rule and the anti-democratic political context is critical in understating the sectarian strife in Muslim societies that have a mix of Sunni Muslims and Shi'i Muslims where identities have been politicized by the state actors in pursuit of their political gains (Hashemi & Postel, 2017; Malmvig, 2019; V. R. Nasr, 2000).

It is also important to recognize that the intensity of the sectarian conflict also depends geographically and is highly dependent on the state actors who can be instrumental in manipulating the public as their political gain lies in competing identities. In recent years particularly after the 2003 US- led invasion in Iraq for instance, this has been evident even

more with the rise of the sectarian tension in the Middle East, where under the authoritarian and undemocratic even corrupt political systems many continue to suffer from various political, economic and social crises as the ruling elite are mainly concerned with staying in power and keeping their dominance (Abdo, 2017; Al-Rasheed, 2011). Authoritarian leaders create rifts instead of maintaining social cohesion within their own societies as a mean for themselves to stay in power by manipulating identity cleavage, as sectarianism and identity mobilization become their dominant ruling feature (Hashemi & Postel, 2017; Malmvig, 2019). Thus, “states can be directly instrumental in [identity mobilization] process, manipulating the protagonists and entrenching identity cleavages[...] as these actors do not champion the cause of any one community but see gain in the conflict between competing identities”(V. R. Nasr, 2000, p.173). Hence, the focus of the society becomes issues that threaten their sense of religious identity and thus their attention is taken away from the corruption or authoritarianism of ruling elites. Therefore, sectarian strife means the ruling authoritarian regimes will stay in power and maintain control as sectarianism would benefit them as it deflects attention from popular demands for social and political change. An important element that adds to the complexity of the current sectarianism in the Middle East is the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran which also needs to be highlighted as it will be relevant to this particular study and provides another important analytical lens, namely a national one, to the question of Sunni/Shi’i identities.

The Saudi/ Iranian rivalry is critical in the sectarianization in Muslim countries. The 1979 revolution in Iran, which is the only Shi’i nation in the region, was a key regional event. As the first Islamic revolution was carried out by Shi’i Muslims, it inevitably politicized the Shi’i identity (Dabashi, 2011; V. R. Nasr, 2000). Saudi Arabia, specifically, along with other

western-backed dictatorships in the Middle East feared the spread of the revolutionary Islam and they heavily invested significant resources to undermine the appeal of a revolution (Al-Rasheed, 2011; Hashemi & Postel, 2017) and in that light perpetuated Shi'ism as a Persian/Iranian phenomenon that was based on a false foundation of Islamic tradition (Hashemi & Postel, 2017). This legitimized a well-funded and powerful anti-Shi'i rhetoric that is rampant in the Middle East through TV shows, school curriculum in Saudi Arabia as well as heavy presence on social media particularly associated with some forms of Salafi Sunni ideology, which claims to be engaged in the process of purifying Muslim society by returning to the earliest and therefore most authentic version of Islam in which Shi'i Muslims are deemed to be infidels and non-believers (Abdo, 2017; Haykel, 2014; Olsson, 2017) and therefore dangerous as they could corrupt the religion of Islam from within (Abdo, 2017; Steinberg, 2014).

As a Shi'i Muslim, this type of anti-Shi'i rhetoric is not new to me, I have seen it on university campuses in Muslim prayer rooms where books that were donated contained such language, I also see this regularly on various social media platforms as well. Of course, by no means I am implying that this is the mainstream view that Sunni Muslims have of Shi'i Muslims, but this hateful rhetoric is well funded and as a campaign has also made itself present in diasporic Muslim communities in the West. Recent studies showcase similar attitude and rhetoric that has left Shi'i minorities threatened in Sweden (Olsson, 2017), Germany (Linge, 2016) and Britain (Degli Esposti & Scott-Baumann, 2019; Olsson, 2017) highlighting the need for paying closer attention to such events in Canada as well.

1.5 Defining and *De-centering* Shi'i Islam

It is important to highlight that this study cannot, on its own, do justice to all forms of diversity of Shi'ism of course, and by no means aims to do so. The focus is on the Twelvers Shi'i Islam and while, as a researcher, I recognize that a more detailed consideration of the diversity of the various forms of Shi'i Islam is desirable, it is beyond the scope of this research to do justice to this diversity. In recent years, particularly after the US- led invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the heightened sectarian tension in the Middle East (K. S. Aghaie, 2014; M. Clarke & Künkler, 2018; Ricotta, 2016) the focus on Shi'i Islam for both academics and non-academics has been a central topic of study, particularly in light of understanding the complexity of the contemporary Middle East politics. In that light, the geopolitical struggle between regional powers, mainly Saudi- Arabia and Iran has been the central focus. As such, Shi'i Islam in the Middle East is often naively understood to have direct links or association with Iran, with a false assumption that it is an exclusively Iranian phenomenon. This claim is of course false as it disregards the fact that almost half the total Shi'is Twelvers of the world's population, approximately 37-39 % of the world's Shi'i population, is concentrated in Iran so this demographic weight and the historical relationship between Iranian revolution of 1979 which was founded on the Twelvers Shi's tradition had a significant impact on the field of Shi'i studies (K. Aghaie, 2001; M. Clarke & Künkler, 2018; Newman, 2013).

The revolution of 1979 in Iran inspired an extensive scholarship specifically on Shi'ism and that is evident by the significant contribution of the countless number of academic scholarship on Iranian Shi'ism. As, Morgan Clarke, an anthropologist with specific interest in contemporary Islam suggests, it is now, more than ever before, time to de-center

Shi'i Islam nominal Iranian core by paying attention to the diversity of Shi'i Islam in a number of different dimensions, such as the Arab Shi'ite (Fuller & Francke, 1999) as well as the 'other Shiite' meaning those beyond Iran, particularly those in Turkey, South and Central Asia (Alessandro Monsutti, Silvia Naef and Farian Sabahi, 2007). All contributing to the necessity of examining the rich diversity and multi-layered identity (rooted in both religion and national origin) of Shi'i Muslims, beyond the Middle East, such as the enriching emergence of research that has also been done on Ismail (Andani, 2016) and Zaidi (Schmidtke, 2012) versions of Shi'ism, it is also worth keeping in mind that among all the non-Iranian Shi'is, Shi'i Twelvers predominate (Newman, 2013).

Hence, within the scope of this particular research, I focus on one of the central notions of the Shi'i identity which is the narrative of Karbala; a central theme in the narratives of all of the participants in this study, all of whom are Twelvers, that they engage with in their everyday lives but is equally central to all forms of Shi'ism. Another important consideration that needs to be highlighted for the purpose of this study is that the participants who took part in this study all self-identify their original home countries as Pakistan, East-Africa and India. In that order, Shi'is in Pakistan comprise between approximately 15-25 percent of the nation's population, which is about 17-26 million people. In India, approximately 16-24 million people, which is about 2 percent of population are Shi'i with a significant small number in eastern Africa (Newman, 2013). I have highlighted these numbers as they correspond to the specific home countries of the participants in this study as I aim to clarify the specifics of this research. As a researcher, I recognize the diverse ethnic and cultural background of the Shi'i communities in Canada generally and BC specifically but including all those would be well beyond the scope of this research, therefore throughout

this dissertation, the narratives and the perspectives that are shared here are especially based on these specific ethnic and cultural backgrounds, I recognize this as one of the limitations of the study, however, it is still a significant contribution to the study of the diverse Shi'i Muslims in Canada.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

In the very beginning of this dissertation, I stated that this is an interdisciplinary research, meaning it aims to incorporate knowledge from two or more disciplines so it can generate an increase in understanding of the causes of a complicated problem (Holland, 2013) and integrate insights from different perspectives in a way that may lead to the emergence of a broader perspective (McMurtry, 2011). William Newell, a leading interdisciplinary scholar, argues that “the ultimate objective of an interdisciplinary inquiry is to understand the portion of the world modeled by [a] particular complex system” (Newell, 2001, p.2). An interdisciplinary approach allows researchers to produce new knowledge by synthesizing insights from old knowledge about specific complex systems as it “facilitates fundamental critique by viewing society or politics or knowledge as the dynamic product of a complex interacting systemic forces” (Newell, 2001, p.5). To that end, I ask, what do victimhood, identity, Karbala, agency, (mis)recognition and Canadian multiculturalism have in common? Thinking of these concepts and each on its own, one can clearly see the complexity that each one of these areas of study holds and for me, as a researcher, my aim is to synthesize insights from these areas of study to produce a new knowledge as those concepts collectively, not on their own, can help us better understand a complex system that is in need of a deeper inquiry, particularly someone like myself where my identity is a mix of all those important and complex elements. This interdisciplinary method is the most suitable

in this case as “an interdisciplinary approach is justified only by a complex system”(Newell, 2001, p.1). In order to carry out an integration of various areas of study, Newell offers a practical steps as follow: first to identify the topic or the problem, followed by determining the relevant disciplines, developing a working command which is the theories and methods, gathering and studying disciplinary insights and finally producing or generating a new emergent understanding into the problem (Holland, 2013; McMurtry, 2011; Newell, 2001). Thus, this dissertation aims to explore the complex identity formation of victimized identities by weaving together political theory, religious narratives of victimhood and agency along with the power of narrative in relation to identity formation through in-depth interviews with Shi’i Muslims in Vancouver rooted in the method of narrative inquiry as articulated by Leavy, Etherington and Whitebrook. Let us examine in more detail these three key interdisciplinary methodological and theoretical dimensions of this dissertation.

1.6.1 Political Theory

With respect to political theory, I deploy key theories and theoretical frameworks to make sense of the central themes developed in this dissertation. I combine insights provided by Hannah Arendt (1959) and Seyla Benhabib (1990) on the meaning of narrative and agency in relation to action along with Iris Young’s ‘Five Faces of Oppression’ (1988) as a framework for understating oppression and victimhood. I use Wendy Brown’s theories of victimhood and injury (1995) as a form of politics with Veen Das’s theory of agentive moments (Das, 2007; Das & Kleinman, 2001) and the idea of agency to provide a theoretical frame for the intersection of victimhood with agency and action. Charles Taylor’s theory of the politics of recognition (Taylor, 1994) and his notion of us/them is useful to frame my understanding of both multiculturalism in Canada, recognition and misrecognition as well as

the intersubjective nature of racialized and religious minorities oppressed by a majority culture. Finally, in exploring religious and cultural diasporic identities (within identities) I draw on the work of Stuart Hall's conception of 'new ethnicities'(Hall, 1990, 1997) , Avigail Eisenberg's 'minorities within minorities' concept to understand how the different realities and experiences of belonging shapes and (re)constructs the Shi'i self-identification as a minority within a minority in the diaspora and within the literature on identity.

Beginning with narrative and agency, as an epigraph to her chapter, "Action" in *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt uses Isak Dinesen's thought-provoking words "all sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them" (Arendt, 1958), inviting us to wonder, what therapeutic potential do stories have that could make sorrows bearable? Stories move us, transform us, teach us and carry us away from the reality we live in as they transcend the barrier of time. In fact, we live our lives in form of a story, a narrative that we tell ourselves and others around us. A central way many communities communicate is in the form of a narrative, when we tell others about who we are, where we are from; how our past experiences define us. The self is an expression of our narratives, our being, what we remember. Arendt wrote that storytelling is a vital element in which we create and recreate our world; a fundamental human activity (Arendt, 1968), as human actions are always identified in form of a narrative. Action, as Benhabib describes it, lives only in the narratives of those "who perform them and the narrative of those who understand, interpret, and recall them" (Benhabib, 1990, p. 187). She argues that narrative is simply the modality through which time is experienced. Our sense of self, one's identity and who we are is revealed through the narrative we tell of ourselves or our becoming, of our past and our present. This is done in our everyday as we claim and we situate ourselves to share with the world who we are because

“narrativity is constitutive of identity”(Benhabib, 1990, p. 187).

The narrative of victimhood has also been explored in political theory. In her book, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, Jenny Edkins argues that “...who we are, or who we think we may be, depends very closely on the social context in which we place and find ourselves. Our existence relies not only on our personal survival as individual beings but also, in a very profound sense, on the continuance of the social order that gives our existence meaning and dignity” (Edkins, 2003, p. 4).

In exploring this notion of victimhood, I have relied on the work of Wendy Brown where she argues that such groups of vulnerable individuals do tend to focus heavily on their “woundedness” and in the process they celebrate victimhood and misery to affirm their positions which becomes marker of their identity (Brown, 1995). Brown finds this notion problematic as identity becomes so invested in its own weakness that it leaves no space for it to transcend and it fails to create that sense of creative agency. In the interpretation of suffering of a victimized identity there exist two possibilities, to be able to create a subject who can be dominated or a subject who can revolt. In this study, this sense of revolt is examined in the context of resistance that this particular diaspora engages within their daily lives because when alienated and ignored these wounds and the constant struggle for recognition could create a state of powerlessness. This sense of powerlessness creates what Wendy Brown has called ‘a state of injury’ which in itself is a “reproach to the present which embodies that history” (Brown, 1995, p. 73). Brown’s notion of a politicized identity constructed by its inability to move past injuries shapes identity politics as the “politicized identity thus enunciates itself, makes claims for itself, only by entrenching, restating, dramatizing, and inscribing its pain in politics; it can hold out no future-for itself or others-

that triumphs over this pain” (Brown, 1995, p. 74). In the case of this Shi’i diasporic community, it is precisely this notion of resistance in the faces of all the forces that tend to alienate and marginalize them that this research is interested in.

Finally, the theoretical framing of misrecognition and intersubjective understanding of identity is also key. According to political philosopher, Charles Taylor, a direct relation exists between recognition and identity and that identity is shaped by recognition or its absence, which can ultimately cause real damage if others in the society assert an attitude of non-recognition or misrecognition (Taylor, 1994). An issue that Brown raises in her *States of Injury*, that I find crucial to explore in this particular research is her emphasis on the importance of understating the “conditions of identity’s desire for recognition.” Brown proposes that “we need to be able to ask: given what produced it, given what shapes and suffuses it, what does politicized identity want?” (Brown, 1995, p. 5). Taylor also insists that in order to understand who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become and where we are going. It is this idea of how we have become that is crucial in this this case. There are two central themes within this research study, victimhood and agency as they relate to the multi-layered identity of this Shi’i Muslims diaspora that I engage with in this study.

1.6.2 Victimhood and Agency: *Shi’i Muslim narratives and Karbala*

In exploring the theme of victimhood, it is important to note that to Shi’i Muslims “whose origin and history is steeped in grief and victimization” (Mack, 1990, p. 119) identity and victimhood are interwoven and inseparable concepts. This will also be demonstrated by the stories that the participants of this study share in the next chapters. Their lived experiences of systematic persecution and misrecognition in their home countries as well as the embeddedness of victimhood within the fabric of their faith, particularly the story of Karbala and how they

engage with the story, sometimes on daily basis has become part of their self-identification, as victimhood is constructed on daily basis as it is a social construct (de Waardt, 2016) through interactions with others, their lived experiences of marginalization and the various ways they give meaning to their lived experiences (Druliolle & Brett, 2018).

In the introduction of this chapter, I shared a personal story of significance that is an important part of my sense of self. The historical story of Hussein in Karbala is a part of a collective identity for Shi'i Muslims around the world, as is the case with each participant in this study as they referenced the significance of this story in relation to their everyday lives. The story of Hussein, in which I will delve in more in depth in the next chapter, is a story that celebrates victimhood, albeit not in a negative sense as helpless victims, but one that builds social belonging and cohesion among Shi'i Muslims and motivates and inspires agency and action in the face of injustice. The story of Hussein in Karbala continues to be a source of inspiration to devout Shi'i Muslims as they view Hussein's stance in the face of injustice as the kind of resistance they need to live by in the faces of the forces that oppress them in their everyday. The historical story of Karbala depicts the massacre of Hussein, the grandson of Muhammed, son of Ali¹⁰, along with 72 of his close companions for his refusal to pledge allegiance to a corrupt caliph according to Shi'i religious narratives. His martyrdom and defiance in the face of oppression has become a phrase of reference to their contemporary sense of victimhood. This sense of victimhood derived from the centuries long religious narratives is analogous to the significance of Christ's passion and sacrifice on the cross to Christians (Hazleton, 2009) and similar to one of the most significant Jewish victimhood defining moment, the Holocaust.

¹⁰ Ali, who was in Shi'i's opinion the rightful successor after Muhammad, in 680AD.

According to Shi'i narratives, Hussein's refusal to pledge allegiance was the ultimate act of resistance. In this, he is seen as an exemplary symbol of defiance and resistance in the face of tyranny, serving as a prime example for humankind to never yield to corrupt ruler. Hussein's famous saying on the day of Ashura¹¹ according to Shi'i historical narratives, continues to live on and remains famous amongst his followers: "*oppression/humiliation is not an option*". From the Shi'i historical perspective the Muslim community was divided once and for all given the atrocities that had befallen the family of Muhammed at Karbala between those who accepted the necessity of allegiance to Hussein and his cause and what he stood for and those who rejected it (Dabashi, 2011; S. H. Nasr, 1988; Schubel, 2006).

The commemoration of the tragedy of Karbala has become an annual holiday of public mourning that continues for ten days. Every year Shi'i Muslims narrate and remember the gripping story of Hussein which depicts how Hussein was killed in Karbala on a day which became known as Ashura, where the story is reiterated, reinforced and remembered. A point of reference that highlights and reinforces the importance of remembrance within the Shi'i communities worldwide is the slogan '*everyday is Ashura and every land is Karbala*' which has and continues to be a political point of reference as seen and documented in various platforms, protests and commemoration gatherings. It has also made itself visible on the frontline of battlefields in Iraq and Yemen in recent years in the fight against ISIS and extremist terror groups. This narrative has become a central narrative that unites Shi'i Muslims diasporas no matter where they are in the world.

¹¹ The tenth day of month of Muharram (the first month of Islamic Calendar); it also means tenth in Arabic.

The event unifies Shi'i Muslims worldwide¹² as the slogan of '*everyday is Ashura and every land is Karbala*' keeps the memory of victimhood and remembrance alive. As Veena Das argues in her exploration of the 'everyday' one could see how this particular event, the story of Karbala in the case of the participants in this study, "attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary" (Das, 2007, p. 1). This sense of victimhood in a sense has become an ordinary part of the everyday lives of the Shi'i Muslims along with a struggle for recognition and this research aims to highlight this not only for those who live in Muslim majority country where the Shi'is are a minority but also the Shi'i Muslim diaspora here in Canada which adds a second form of victimization and marginalization that this research aims to engage with as the participants of the study share their narratives and lived experiences of living in double marginalization. In the next chapter I will go in much more depth as I explore politics of victimhood in relation to the historical story of Karbala and the everyday lived experiences of the participants of this study.

In exploring the theme of victimhood in relation to this diasporic community, I argue that this sense of victimhood, not only has manifested itself in places where the state sponsored Shi'i persecution takes place in places such as Bahrain, Saudi-Arabia for instance, but also in diasporic communities within the migratory context (Ali, 2019; Scharbrodt, 2018; Shanneik, 2015; Tabar, 2003). It is also important to note that this sense of victimization imposed by the state in places where the Shi'i Muslims are a minority is also complemented by the marginalization that is imposed on them by the larger community, such as my own personal

¹² Recent estimates taken from the Pew research centre study "The Future of the Global Muslim Population: Projections for 2010-2030," put's world's Muslim population around 1.5 billion, with Shi'i Muslims representing about 12% of that number. Full report can be found: <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/future-of-the-global-muslim-population-sunni-and-shia/>

experiences that I shared at the very beginning of this chapter. In a study conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, a research institute based in Washington DC, showed in most Arab countries Shi'is are not considered 'real Muslim'¹³ along with approximately 40% who do not accept Shi'i Muslims as 'fellow Muslims' particularly in countries where Shi'i Muslim represent a minority (Abdo, 2017). This sense of misrecognition and marginalization is carried with the Shi'i migrants as they relocate, a common theme in the stories of the participants in this study that I will share in the upcoming chapters. This transnational sense of victimhood which is heavily influenced by the current sectarian tension that is seen by the Shi'i Muslim diaspora in their home countries and especially and more recently, in light of the heightened sectarian tensions as the result of ISIS's anti-Shi'i mission in particular (Linge, 2016) is hence relocated with the new diasporic communities.

With respect to the religious dimensions of victimhood, narratives of victimhood based on religious history has shaped the tradition and the collective consciousness of Shi'i Muslims everywhere (Mallat, 1993). As Tami Jacoby, a scholar who focuses on politics of victimhood, argues such experiences that binds groups are "continuously created and re-created in ways that sustain their emotional intensity over time" (Jacoby, 2014, p. 523). The past traumas and tragedies are even more significant as they are glorified and re-enacted with "greater vigour in contemporary struggle for recognition" (Jacoby, 2014, p. 524).

For Shi'i Muslims, the martyrdom of Hussein in Karbala has become a symbol of their own victimhood and marginalization especially in places where they are a minority or

¹³ [Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. "The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity."](https://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-executive-summary/) [PewForum.org](https://www.pewforum.org/) (available here: <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-executive-summary/>), it is also important to highlight the overwhelming majority of Shi'i Muslims are concentrated in India, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan. Source: Pew Research Centre <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/future-of-the-global-muslim-population-sunni-and-shia/>

repressed by the state mainly in the Arab world. Karbala holds a place of central importance in the piety of Shi'i Muslims; a sacred space, a site of a particular historical tragedy. The symbolism and the narratives of Karbala has shaped the ideology of resistance for Shi'i Muslims worldwide. The slogan '*everyday is Ashura and every land is Karbala*' is seen as a symbol and a representation of the marginalization that Shi'i Muslims, in places where they perceive injustice in their everyday especially in places where they are a minority with repressive regimes—Here it is when the past and the present are intertwined. Karbala in this context not only serves as a point of reference for the maintenance of the group's identity, it is also a continuous call to creative action.

Considering the long history of deprecation and suffering with a deeply embedded sense of sorrow, mourning and martyrdom particularly with reference to Hussein the Shi'i historical memory (Abdo, 2017; Howarth, 2005) is deeply ingrained in this idea of 'pain in politics'. This as a result has given birth to a rich tradition fashioned around victimhood and remembrance that is deeply rooted in grief. Although for the longest time, especially for those who have lived as a repressed minority in places where they are persecuted Shi'i Muslims, concealing their identities (Bøe & Flakerud, 2017) and cautious expression of faith had been the only option; where standing up to the rule of tyranny or injustice and deprivation was never really an option. However, even within such complex circumstances, the simple act of remembrance of Hussein which is in various parts of the Arab world continues to be seen as a political act by the state, where the Shi'i Muslims are a minority, those events continue to take a place with full intensity during the days of month of Muharam. Remembrance of grief in this way as Ali Shariati, a Shi'i Scholar and philosopher,

has called it “shows a path to action”¹⁴ it invites them to act in the face of whatever force that oppresses them. In fact, when we look at protests that took place during the Arab Spring in places like Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, where the Shi’i Muslims are heavily marginalized and deprived of various citizenship rights, peaceful protesters who were demanding equal rights used connotations , slogans and banners that referenced Hussein and their allegiance and devotion to justice (Abdo, 2017; Matthiesen, 2012). Such actions, even in the most subtle forms, showcase the power of transformation in mobilizing even the most vulnerable and deprived identities if religious convictions are used as motivator.

In this regard, Brown offers the same solution for such victimized identities she suggests, to destabilize the fixed position of identity by leaving it open to continuous transformation but without “forgetting”. Instead of “forgetting” she makes a compelling argument about changing and reconstructing a politicized identity by shifting and transforming its position and where it stands; “what if we sought to supplant the language of “I am” with its defensive closure on identity, its insistence on the fixity of position, its equation of social and moral positioning-with the language of “I want this for us?”. This aspect of Brown’s work speaks directly to my research. In examining the role of victimhood on identity formation I am intrigued to explore how does that sense of agency emerges within those communities and if it does what perpetuates it.

In the case of this particular Shi’i Muslim community in BC, *a minority within a minority*, they perceive themselves as misrepresented and misrecognized. They are inevitably caught in an unfortunate intersection, faced not only with Islamophobia from one end but also

¹⁴ Excerpt from Red Shi’ism (the religion of martyrdom) Vs. Black Shi’ism (the religion of mourning) By Dr. Ali Shariati. Full Translated version available at: https://archive.org/stream/AliShariatiRedAndBlackShiism/Ali%20Shari'ati_Red%20and%20Black%20Shi'ism_djvu.txt

anti-Shi'i sentiments from the rest of the Muslim community. In the face of marginalization, this Shi'i diaspora in BC, have been organizing themselves by remembering and actively seeking political participation and representation to reinstate and reinforce the ideas of equitable participation and belonging. In this light, it is important to acknowledge that "internal identifications of victimhood or victimhood types come to the fore within the context of daily life and the results these have on the possibilities of victim activism"(de Waardt, 2016, p.441-442) where collective action as a community becomes a coping strategy in the face of marginalization and alienation.

The collective community work of this particular community, the research participants, can be seen as an expression of agency as "they organize together in order to claims rights and re-signify meaning"(Druliolle & Brett, 2018, p.7) and assert their identities as demonstrated through their attempts at organizing events for the public good with various NGO's and various groups such as Idle No More as well as Black Lives Matter Vancouver. They have been organizing various blood drives, food banks and most recently an initiative that provides backpacks for children in need, and feeding homeless population in Vancouver East-side. A much more comprehensive explorations of their community engagement will be discussed in the next chapters. Their voluntary social participation and engagement could be seen as an attempt for seeking recognition and equal citizenship particularly as they join other marginalized groups as they reaffirm their "sense of solidarity and companionship with other victims"(de Waardt, 2016, p.445). As they side with the groups who have been marginalized or oppressed, by the dominating power, they mainly cite their own sense of victimhood as the sources of their mobilization with special reference to the historical story of Hussein that generate their sense of agency, demonstrating how that serves as a source of

their mobilization. For centuries, the story of Hussein in Karbala and his stance in the face of injustice, according to Shi'i narratives, has been a key to the mobilization of suffering and victimhood to that of action for Shi'i Muslims worldwide (Degli Esposti & Scott-Baumann, 2019; Khalili, 2007); a topic that will be thoroughly discussed in the next chapters as well.

It is in this case where the concept known as “agentive moment”, finding one’s voice in making of one’s history” (Das, 2001, p. 6) comes into play. The remaking of the world is also a matter of being able to re-contextualize the narrative of devastation and generate new contexts through which everyday life may become possible. Where victimhood becomes an agentive concept that enables victims to move past their suffering. For instance, in her work in post-partition India, Veena Das suggests that “the experience of subjugation may itself, when owned and worked upon, become the source for claiming a subject position” (Das, 2001, p. 6) An idea that Brown proposes as well –the movement from the first person singular pronoun, the “I” to the claiming of a plural first person “we”. One then must ask, how such communities shape a future if the present and the past is steeped in victimization and how if they decide can they overcome this subjugation and how do they engage in a politics of recognition if they ever choose to do so as “focusing on victimization undermines capacity for choice and action; however, focusing on capacity and action may minimize the real facts of victimization. The passive and helpless connotations of victimization lie at the heart of this dilemma.”(Minow, 1992, p.1427).

In this research I aim to find answers to whether there is a possibility to “re-contextualize the narratives of devastation and generate new contexts though which everyday life may become possible” (Das, 2001, p. 6). Ronnie Bulman cites the example of *Victor Frankl* a Holocaust survivor from Auschwitz, who said “in order to survive individuals had to see

meaning and purpose in their suffering” (Bulman, 1985, p. 21). Bulman argues that finding a purpose in the victimization is one way of coping with a world that makes little sense, feeling of helplessness leads to a loss of self-esteem (Bulman, 1985). In victimization what is needed is the re-establishment of a view of the world as meaningful in which events once again make sense, regaining of positive self-image, perceptions of self-worth and strength. In this research I aim to use the narratives of the participants of this study as they tell me about their lived experiences as Shi’i Muslims in Canada in order to illuminate these central questions of victimhood, agency, misrecognition and being a minority within a minority.

The stories of the participants in this study offer a new and alternative narratives as they reclaim a space for their stories amidst those of others. A plethora of research on Muslim immigrants have been conducted in recent years specifically in Canada, a multicultural nation that takes pride in the diversity and its promotion of equitable participation (J. W. Berry & Kalin, 2007) that it promises to promote. In response, a diverse Muslim immigrant population has taken a cautious approach, particularly in light of Islamophobia, to the misguided but popular notion that Muslim immigrants in the host countries are monolithic. What is however left out from this particular stance are the narratives of the minorities within minorities. Those that have been sidelined for a variety of reasons including but not limited to fear of being identified as those who are sowing discord within the larger Muslim community or fearing backlash. However, under the promise of multiculturalism that “*every individual should have an equal opportunity with other individuals to make the life that the individual is able and wishes to have*¹⁵” these alternative narratives of this particular minority, the Shi’i Muslims of Canada are worthy of our attention.

¹⁵ Preamble to the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1985.

1.6.3 Narratives: The Power of Stories

The relationship between identity formation and narrative is central to this particular research and thus I deploy narrative inquiry as a foundational methodology in this dissertation. Since storytelling, specifically, the story of Karbala is a pivotal component in the lives of the Shi'i Muslims, I aim to use stories of the members of Shi'i Muslims community here in BC to explore and understand how identity is constructed and reconstructed for this particular minority within a minority (Eisenberg & Spinner-Halev, 2005; Sachedina, 1994) diaspora, as their narratives have been absent in the literature in Canada. Dan McAdams in his *'life story of identity'* model postulates that individuals make meaning of their lives, by integrating past experiences, the perceived present and an imagined future and this evolving story of the self is what provides a sense of purpose in life (McAdams, 2001). This model is especially important to this particular research for Shi'i Muslims as historical narratives not only inspire the actions of the individuals' everyday life (Shanneik, 2015) but also connect the past to the present and shows 'a path of action'¹⁶ for the future. In an attempt to understand and explore the relationship of narratives to Shi'i Muslim identity politics I aim to employ a narrative inquiry approach to facilitate this dynamic, particularly since there is a special emphasis on narratives in the lives of Shi'i Muslims.

This interdisciplinary analysis now brings me back to my original inquiry. I ask, how does an identity that is deeply rooted in victimhood both in terms of their religious and historical narratives, that has led to systematic marginalization and persecution politically, find a way to transcend that notion of victimhood, in order to have a future. Will a victimized

¹⁶ Excerpt from Red Shi'ism (the religion of martyrdom) Vs. Black Shi'ism (the religion of mourning) By Dr. Ali Shariati. Full Translated version available at: https://archive.org/stream/AliShariatiRedAndBlackShiism/Ali%20Shari'ati_Red%20and%20Black%20Shi'ism_djvu.txt

identity that has suffered political persecution and marginalization prior to migrating to Canada carry that sense of victimhood with them to Canada even when that fear is non-existent? How do such individuals and communities organize and think of themselves? Considering the historical narrative of Hussein that has shaped their understanding of self, socio-political stance, will it be safe to say that it has been the source of their mobilization and agency? And if so, how? My research aims to further examine the question of continuity and discontinuity of a victimized identity as it moves to Canada where the direct threat is lifted. The vulnerability associated with this sense of victimhood that they carry and its effects on identity formation and the host country, in this case Canada, is a topic that has been understudied and this interdisciplinary research study aims to find answers to some unanswered questions in the field of victimhood.

Narrative is a key theme in this dissertation as it is directly linked to the understanding of self for this Shi'i Muslim diaspora; the historical narrative of Hussein that has been the marker of their identities is the bearer of their political identities. The reiteration of this historical narrative could be seen here as an attempt for recognition and belonging which is demonstrated through their community organizations and their attempt at political participation. The importance of narrative in the livelihood of this particular community will also be explored in relation to the main themes of each chapter. What this research will also highlight is that the Shi'i-Sunni complex relationship, particularly amidst the heightened sectarian tension in the Middle East in the recent years, is not limited to a geographic region where the conflict is intense, but in fact it follows individuals as they immigrate elsewhere in the world. As I discussed this issue earlier, the Sunni-Shi'i polarization has become an increasingly relevant topic not only in the Arab world but also among Muslim in Europe, North

America and Australia (Ali, 2019; Alibhai, 2018; Degli Esposti, 2018; Scharbrodt, 2018; Shanneik, 2015; Tabar, 2003; Liyakat Takim, 2018) and even more so in recent years during ISIS's expansion in Syria and Iraq. The Sunni- Shi'i tensions are in fact rearticulated in new contexts within the host nations (Linge, 2016) and it is important now more than ever to pay closer attention to narratives that address these issues¹⁷.

According to Statistics Canada Data from 2011, there are about 1,053,25 Muslims in Canada with no statistical data enumerating the number of Shi'i Muslims in Canada as immigration records fail to indicate sectarian affiliation adding to their invisibility as Shi'i Muslims in Canada; this is compounded by the reality that Shi'i Muslims are understudied in Canada. The aim of this dissertation is to explore how this sense of suffering and victimhood constructs their sense of self and whether the living condition and the environment influence the notion of victimhood and whether it changes over time. In addition, this research explores how living in Canada may or may not change perceptions about victimhood alongside, narratives of inclusion, integration and participation. Although the Canadian multicultural system takes pride in the diversity it has fostered throughout the years and envisions itself to be a safe haven for religious minorities who have fled persecution, many believe that when it comes to studying Muslims in Canada, the fact that the Muslim community is multi-ethnic, diverse with multiple sectarian affiliation and multi-lingual is often ignored and hence the specific needs of different groups are not being met or even included in the theoretical understanding of identity politics itself. As Ben-Sira, a psychologist in the field of immigration

¹⁷ In his 2017 article, "A Study of Iraqi Immigrants: Has the Shi'a-Sunni Conflict Been Transferred to Ottawa, Canada" Ahmad Jafar has looked at a particular diasporic community in Ottawa, Canada where he argues, based on interviews with the research participants, that the Shi'a-Sunni conflict has been transferred to Ottawa, but of course it is non-violent and a low level conflict. In his study, he also briefly explores the commemoration of Ashura and its impact on the participants, but he suggests a further and a deeper analysis of this particular topic for future studies is needed (Jafar, 2017).

argues, successful integration takes place when demands and needs of both the immigrant as well as the host nation are met (Ben-Sira, 1997). There are concerns that need to be examined and addressed in relation to their integration process in order to avoid a further misrecognition and victimization.

1.7 Methodology: Narrative Inquiry and Gathering

Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (think of Carpaccio's Saint Ursula), stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, trans historical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (Roland Barthes, 1993)

The key to the methodological approach to this dissertation in relation to these theoretical underpinnings provided by political theory scholars and Shi'i narratives of Karbala is a novel research method known as narrative inquiry. I began this chapter with a story, of my childhood, that is still so vivid in my mind that I can to this day remember some of the most intricate details of that memory, the community, the drive to mosque, the smell of the customary dish that is served in those days, the communal getting together to listen to the story of Hussein. Those memories are not unique to me, perhaps every living Shi'i Muslim no matter where they are in the world have a childhood story they can remember about this annual event. My childhood story about how I engage with the narrative of Karbala shapes who I am and my perspective of the world around me. As a Shi'i Muslim, I grew up with religious narratives, a common approach for devout Shi'i Muslims around the world. Stories and religious narrative such as narrative of Karbala informs and guides the everyday life of Shi'i Muslims as the past and the present is understood in form of a narrative. So, it makes

sense to study the world narratively if we understand the world and who we are narratively (D. J. Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) this approach, in this context seemed the most fitting.

As I embarked this research, the narrative inquiry approach became of an immense interest to me because narrative inquiry “embraces narrative as both the method and phenomena of the study”(Clandinin et al., 2012, p.3). It is through a narrative inquiry that I can, as researcher, explore the impact and the ways each participant engages with the narrative of Karbala as they speak of its impact in the context of their everyday, through their lived and told stories. Since “narrative inquirers embrace the metaphoric quality of language and the connectedness and coherence of the extended discourse of the story entwined with exposition, argumentation, and description”(Clandinin et al., 2012, p.26). As a researcher I am interested in the narratives of the participants in this study because the past, present and the future are all intertwined and linked to religious narratives that shape their understanding of resistance and victimhood. Hence a narrative inquiry approach which is “an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods- all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them”(Chase, 2005, p.651) creates an opportunity to “produce important, complex, socially useful, politically powerful, and potentially disruptive knowledge about human psyches, processes, behaviors, and relationships”(Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001, p.5).

When I began writing the introduction to this study, for me, there was no other way to connect with my readers other than telling them about the importance of that story in relation to what I am choosing to write about. The story is an important part of who I am and who I have become, it has been the reason why I dedicated years of research during my graduate

studies, both in my master's studies as well as my doctoral work. I remember telling one of my colleagues awhile back that this research has helped me find myself – answering the questions that I had about my own identity– it is helping me find myself not only as a researcher and who I am, but it also provides important insights into the politics of identity, victimhood and agency of Shi'i Muslims more generally in Canada. As Patricia Leavy explains, qualitative research involves “the study of others, but also about the self and the complex relationships between, within, and among people and groups, including our own entanglements” (Leavy, 2014, p. 1). This is precisely how I see and locate myself as a researcher in this study. As I conducted my interviews I sought to make sure I am aware of my own positionality as a researcher, and therefore conduct the kind of research that in no way was based on the idea that as a researcher I had the “sole authority” and a hierarchical position over my research participants, but one that recognized my research participants as “knowledge bearers and co-creators” (Leavy, 2014, p. 5).

In my research, I've found that narrative inquiry allows “to explore the marginalized, controversial, and disruptive perspectives that have often been lost in more traditional research methodologies” (Estrella & Forinash, 2007, p.377) as it offers “the possibility of disruption to the dominant discourse within theory and research”(Estrella & Forinash, 2007, p.376-377) which can ultimately assist researchers to understand more about the human experience. Therefore, I utilize a narrative inquiry approach as my research methodology as I hope to give voice to aspects of identity that has been underexamined in the life of Shi'i Muslims in Canada as I aim to discover something that is new and previously unknown by bringing awareness to the identity formation of this particular minority in Canada.

During my very first interview one of the participants in this study said to me that this study appealed to them mainly because the researcher doing this work is a Shi'i Muslim "who gets it". Another participant once said to me prior to the interview that they were "excited" about this research because someone now 'cares' about "their stories and what they have got to say". I wanted to learn more about their stories, about what "they wanted to say". I wanted to learn about their lived experiences, and what meaning they were giving to their everyday and narrative inquiry which aims to preserve those complexities and the context of lived experiences seemed to be the most appropriate approach as it focuses on human experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). There is a unique power in the practice of narrative inquiry, one that "seeks to humanize the human sciences, placing people, meaning, and personal identity at the center"(Bochner & Riggs, 2014, p. 1); one that allows participants to have a voice where the researcher is not dominating the voice of the participants (A. Bochner & Riggs, 2014; Leavy, 2014).

The method of narrative inquiry is based on collecting and analysing and re-representing stories of participants, told by them, as co-creators- based on their lived experiences as "telling and re-telling one's story helps a person create a sense of self" (Etherington, 2004, p. 75) as their stories activate an emotional response and invites the reader to reflect as "the stories tell us how they cope with exceptional, difficult, and transformative crises; how they invent new ways of speaking when old ways fail them; and how they turn calamities into gifts"(A. P. Bochner, 1997, p. 434). In the next a few chapters, the stories of the participants of this study will tell of those transformations – from victimhood and marginalization to agency- in their own words. This is precisely what narrative inquiry entails, the interest in the past, present and the future as "we are historical beings who live in

the present, under the weight of the past and the uncertainty of the future[...] we are called to make sense of and remember the past in order to move ahead and attend to the future, thus , time, memory and narrative are inextricably linked” (Bochner & Riggs, 2014, p. 2) which is extremely relevant in this study as it will be clearly shown in the stories shared by the participants of this study in the upcoming chapters.

There were initially 12 interviews that were conducted but only 9 of those stories will be used in this research. Although, I will speak more about the participants in this study in the next section, the number of interviews conducted was simply based on the willingness of how many participants volunteered to partake in this study. Several participants decided to opt out after the interview was completed, fearing repercussions for sharing their stories, adding another layer to the complexity this community experiences; fear. This will be also apparent in some of the stories of the participants as they shared their narratives in the next chapters. I have taken the necessary measures to conceal the names of the participant as well as the name of the community centre in order to ensure all of the study participants anonymity is preserved. It is precisely because of such experiences, I have found narrative inquiry a more fitting research method for this particular research, as it gives participants “a greater access to previously marginalized minority populations who, in turn, championed the need to give voice to silenced narratives and marginalized group and communities; and a growing commitment to use research to make a difference personally, emotionally, politically, and culturally” (Bochner & Riggs, 2014, p. 10).

I’ve chosen semi-structured interview technique as it allows for accommodation of a range of research goals, with its use of questions, prompts, which draws the participants more fully not the topic under study (Galletta & Cross, 2013). Open ended questions create space for

participants to narrate their experiences, allowing their voices to emerge without disrupting their stories. This was especially important as certain experiences that they shared were at times emotional and expressive and semi-structured interviews allowed for that space where the participants were free to verbally express emotions (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). The reciprocity between myself as a researcher, and the participants, was another advantage to the semi-structured interviews, where follow-up questions were used in order to clarify certain aspects of the narratives they shared with me particularly as I recognized my ‘insider’ position as a Shi’i Muslim in Canada in this research. My shared experiences may have enhanced my feelings of empathy and sympathy towards the participants, and that may have garnered richer data as participants may have felt more comfortable speaking to someone who have experienced similar challenges. Throughout the process I was careful not to project my understanding of my experience onto them by ensuring that their voices remained dominant throughout the interviews. I asked for clarification through follow up questions to ensure that I was not assuming what they were trying to say based on their own experiences and their own ideas and not my assumptions and semi-structured interviews provided that flexibility (Kallio et al., 2016) which was so vital throughout the interview process.

The value and the importance of these nine narratives, the voice of the participants themselves will strengthen every aspect of this research in a nuanced way as the goal of narrative inquiry is to ‘keep the conversation going’ about what needs to be done next to address the inequities that this particular community faces. Narrative inquiry as a methodology aims to “activate subjectivity, feeling, and identification in readers and listeners’ to raise consciousness; to promote empathy and social justice; and to encourage activism- in short, to show what it can mean to live a good life and create a just society” (Bochner & Riggs, 2014,

p. 11). Each chapter will begin with direct statement taken from every participant as it relates to each theme discussed in the following chapters. The narrative inquiry approach allows me to ‘access participants’ life experiences and engage in a process of storying and restorying in order to reveal multidimensional meanings and present an “authentic and compelling rendering of the data” (Leavy, 2009, p. 46); although such research “often relies on small sample size but produces rich case studies” (Leavy, 2009, p. 27). Thorough the analysis of these narratives and data collection, I will be able to extract emerging themes of perceived victimhood in connection to religion and identity, from the fullness of lived experiences of the research participants.

There are dimensions of social life that are largely impenetrable by traditional research methods including ethnographic observations and interviews. A narrative inquiry enables “real, textured, complex, sensory contextual meaning” (Leavy, 2009, p. 28) to emerge. This method enables the participants to have a voice, empower them to be able to tell their stories “uninterrupted” (Leavy 2009, p. 28) where the participant’s story retains its integrity, since “narratives can be viewed as a frame through which people make sense of their lives” (Leavy 2009, p. 32) Through the stories gathered, this research will then go through the process of “restorying” which enables further analysis of the stories for key elements which is then complemented by representing them “chronologically in order to provide causal links and thus create meaning” (Leavy 2009, p. 33). This methodology allows for the emergence of a story that is derived directly from the data collected and is also shaped with all the research participants’ stories.

In this study I argue that the establishment of identity using narrative to tell a story about the self is a “necessary prerequisite for political agency” (Whitebrook 2011, p. 141). The

term political agency goes hand in hand with recognition in this case. An identity that is unable to have a coherent sense of self, meaning those who are unable to tell their own stories “suffer from lack of recognition and are therefore unable to act” (Whitebrook, 2011, p. 143). Since “without the knowledge of who they are by others, be it the leaders, rulers or fellow citizens, they will not be able to act or allowed or given opportunities” (Whitebrook 2011, p. 143). For the participants in this study if oppression and injustice and their existence is entrenched in this idea of constant victimhood, these identities cannot outgrow or advance in to a realm outside of victimhood if the very foundation of who you are or what you see yourself as is entrenched in this idea of ‘I am a victim’ and all around me and the people who are members of my own group are being constantly targeted how can these identities evolve?

The availability of a safe space where those who have been silenced and marginalized find their own voices, where victims are able to speak for themselves politically and find their own voices “in a community with other voices” (Das & Kleinman, 2001, p. 1) is essentially what this vulnerable group needs. Using personal narrative to situate the self in social context provides a substantial understanding of how this vulnerable group defines who they are. Enabling them to define who they are by allowing them to narrate their stories instead of having their narratives being written for them by others. As participants place their narratives in the larger context of current politics and history, these narratives will highlight their sense of self, their needs, their struggle and their wounds which allows for an increase in the clarity and urgency of this research. Each narrative in this research aims to bind together theory and the personal in order to demonstrate how the personal narratives influence theoretical articulations.

1.7.1 Participants:

I was first introduced to this particular community centre in 2012 when I moved to British Columbia from Ontario. As a Shi'i Muslim, just as any other faith-based community, it is the norm to learn where the nearest place of worship that one identifies with when moving to a new city. My very first visit was on a Friday, as I went to the Friday prayer, I still remember how amazed I was with the architecture of the building, the interior design, the calligraphy and the dome that was so beautifully filled with Islamic art and calligraphy. After prayer, a woman introduced herself to me as I looked like a new visitor. It seemed that the majority knew each other there, I could feel the sense of community and warmth amongst them. When I said I was new the very first thing this woman offered me was her personal cell phone number, she said to me, call me if you need anything since I was new. It was a beautiful gesture and I cherish that to this day. The community centre is located in Vancouver lower mainland. That centre became where I attended Friday prayers on occasions, major Islamic events and their website became the main resource point if I wanted to find any information related to anything from prayer times to places where I could donate to charity. It became the centre for all of my religious inquiries and resources. I was intrigued by their level of organization, the amount of collective community work they regularly held, regular events and countless number of activities, in addition to their extensive work on charitable donations. I was mainly fascinated by how they were always looking for opportunities to be involved with other communities.

The majority of members of the centre were members of the East African immigrant community of Indian origin, as well as South Asian Shi'i Muslim; there are however, various other ethnicities, such as Iranian and Arab including members from Lebanon, Iraq and Saudi Arabia who are also members of the community centre. I became increasingly interested in

their mission to collaborate and build relationships with other communities, this idea was new to me, yet their active role in their community was very appealing. Their active roles and the promise of their mission became even clearer to me during the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Program that Canada adopted. At the time, I was working as a Refugee Resettlement Counselor where I worked with newly arrived Syrian families and assisted them with their resettlement here in Vancouver. Just as many other communities across BC, this community centre began their charitable work to donate and provide with every means they could to help the newly arrived families. Unfortunately, they were faced with unique kinds of challenges as other Muslim communities began rejecting their help and donations (more context of these incidents will be provided in the next chapters as it speaks to the notion of victimhood and being a minority within a minority in a very direct way). In these interactions, I built unforgettable friendships and relationships with many of them as they spoke to me about their struggles and frustrations as a minority within a minority community.

The stories that I will share in the next chapters are based on the lived experience of members of this community as they shared with me stories of marginalization, dedication, hope, acts of resistance and resilience. Thus, I chose these individuals to interview because this community centre represents a diversity of genders and national origins and because I sought to understand the very sensitive question of identity and victimhood in some depth, my connection to this community and living within it allowed for a deeper understanding in the interviews themselves than if I had chosen other Shi'i Muslims to interview. Thus, whatever down sides one might presume there would be in terms of my proximity to this community, the upside is a much larger capacity to get at the very issues and questions that lie at the core of this dissertation since the participants felt they could trust me with their narratives and their

sense of identity within Canada.

Participants in this study were selected after a call for interview was posted on the notice board of the community centre. This was done in accordance with the regulations of the community centre standards of practice which also required me to contact the director of public relations and communication to seek permission to conduct the research study. Many of the participants who contacted me to partake in the study, also notified me that they had heard from their friends and they were interested in participating. The stories that will be shared in this study are based on in-depth interviews with 9 members of this community centre, adults ranging from 21 years old to 56 years old, 3 men and 6 women. Most of them volunteered to partake in this study because they wanted their stories to be told as they said to me. While the participants are of various national origins, I was asked not to disclose their national identities and will respect their wishes for anonymity. All nine participants are given pseudonyms as per their request.

The participants in this study are all Canadian citizens and currently live and work in Vancouver lower mainland. They are all active members of their community centre and at the time of the interviews were all employed in various professions. Ahmed is a graduate student. He is one of the youngest participants in this study. He has lived in BC since he was a very young child, his family moved to Canada when he was 5 years old. Maysa is a teacher at a private school and has been in that role for more than a decade. Maysa moved to Canada more than 30 years ago and now lives with her husband and children in Vancouver. Malika is a manager at a private corporation and has been in Canada for more than 40 years as she moved to Canada with her family. Zeina lives with her family in Vancouver and has called this city home for more than 25 years, she works as a head of an administrative unit in a

private academic institution. Munir, a small business owner, moved to Vancouver more than 15 years ago with his young family. Amin is a well-traveled scholar and an academic who has been living in Vancouver for a decade, he now lives with his young family in Vancouver and works as a lecturer. Leila is the youngest participants in this study, she is a recent graduate and currently works in a financial institution and has called Vancouver home since she moved here as a child when she was 2 years old. Maryam has been living in Vancouver for more than 2 decades and now has a young family and works as a part-time consultant. Mahin has been living in Canada for more than 3 decades and is currently working as an IT manager in a company and currently lives with her children in Vancouver.

| Name (Pseudonym) | Age Group | Gender | Occupation | Time in Canada |
|-----------------------------|------------------|---------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Ahmed | 21-28 | Male | Graduate Student | 18 years+ |
| Maysa | 40-50 | Female | Teacher | 30 years |
| Malika | 40-50 | Female | Manager | 40 years |
| Zeina | 40-50 | Female | Academic Administration | 25 years |
| Munir | 50-56 | Male | Small Business Owner | 15 years |
| Amin | 30-40 | Male | Academic | 10 years+ |
| Leila | 21-28 | Female | Financial Officer | 18 years + |
| Maryam | 30-40 | Female | Part-time Consultant | 20 years+ |
| Mahin | 40-50 | Female | IT Manager | 30 years |

Each one of them engages with the narrative of Kabala from a unique perspective, one that speaks to their lived experiences as Shi'i Muslims in Canada or as they call it 'home'. It is

important to note and acknowledge that although other axis of their multi-layered identities might also shape how they see and think of themselves within the discourse of a multi-cultural and inclusive Canada, the Shi'i axis of their identity remains central to the way they have articulated their sense of self within their narratives in this study. The transnational Shi'i identities have been studied particularly in Europe in the recent years, indicating a certain kind of prioritization of the Shi'i axis by Shi'i Muslims, over the ethnic identities (Bos, 2011; Chatziprokopiou, Marios, Hatziporkopiou, 2017; Degli Esposti, 2018; Mallat, 1993; Scharbrodt, 2011).

Another important element within this research is of course, the locality and the place where this research happens. Vancouver, as a city is of course home to the participants in this study, it is where they have established their lives and community. It is a place where the everyday happens along with the diversity they celebrate and speak of. It is also the place where they experience marginalization and discrimination but at the same it is also the place where their everyday forms of resistance take shape. The lived experiences of the participants in this study are produced in relations to local places of contact and encounter which is in this case, Vancouver. There is of course, multiple meanings associated with the everyday and the places and sites one relates and connects with as many human geographers have studied and explored the connection between, migration, community and place. In their article *"Reflection on Migration, Community, and Place"* Deborah Phillips and David Robinson, argue that places, such as the city, home and communal spaces are multilayered, so a place, they highlight is "not simply a fixed and objective but also as subjective and practiced- as created and re-created by its users and their interactions"(Phillips & Robinson, 2015, p.410). Vancouver is such a city, the everyday experiences of this particular community is shaped by

their personal experiences, social networks, community “that shape an individual’s sense of place in their immediate locality”(Phillips & Robinson, 2015, p.410)

In their stories, we will notice their emphasis on the relationships they have built as a community in Vancouver with other marginalized groups, and particular memberships of those communities. Such as their community efforts to feed the homeless in Vancouver East-Side, their Project Backpack that aims to provide school supplies to children in need in Vancouver as well as their efforts to build collaborative relationships with Black Lives Matter Vancouver as their sense of agency and collective community work is connected to local politics and communities. For this particular community collective community work and civic engagement is imbedded in the relationship they have and continue to build with others in this city. Their collective engagements and helping other marginalized communities has been shaped by their locality here in Vancouver. As a researcher, I acknowledge this research study is specific as it is related to the lives of these particular participants, the residents of Vancouver. It would be of course interesting to look at how other Shi’i Muslim Canadians in other cities define and articulate their sense of identity in relation to their local relationships and encounters within their everyday. In a commentary, Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, both human geographers, write in “*Cities and Ethnicities*” about how “different cities provide different resources for particular ethnic groups to construct themselves[...]”(Amin & Thrift, 2002, p.297). They highlight how “different cities have different ethnic style and therefore different demands for rights to the city”(Amin & Thrift, 2002, p.297). This idea therefore impacts migrants ability to find a place to claim their rights and achieve political recognition (Amin & Thrift, 2002; Phillips & Robinson, 2015). Just as we will read that the

participants' stories illustrate how their civic engagement is also influenced by their relations, connections and encounters within the city of Vancouver.

1.8 Conclusion

By exploring the various ways in which members from this diasporic community experience, construct and articulate their identities I seek to examine the ways they grapple with the historical narrative of Hussein that is steeped in victimization, and how that informs their religious identities. I defend an approach that considers this insistence on remembrance and the embeddedness of the historical narratives in daily life produced by victims, when “owned and worked upon” (Das, 2001, p. 6) not only is a form of resistance and a force that makes politics visible, but also a part of the apparatus of social inclusion and recognition. This study examines a detailed narrative of nine Shi'i Muslims as they define and articulate their sense of selves. These storied selves depict oppression, resistance, strength, fear and hope in a nuanced way that shed light on how post-migratory Shi'i minority communities as well as individuals organize and think of themselves even after they have moved to a new country where the direct threat is lifted by also considering the transnational impact of recent sectarian events in the Middle East on such communities.

1.9 Chapter Summaries:

In the second chapter, I explore the complexities of politics of victimhood. In relation to the identity formation of this Shi'i Muslim diaspora in BC based on the stories shared by the participants, I will further examine three main categories that directly relate to the politics of victimhood: perception, representation and symbolism of victimhood in relation to this particular community. One key focus of this study is the theoretical examination of the complex concept of victimhood in relation to identity and politics. Scholars haven't been able

to provide or agree on a single comprehensive definition of the term victimhood due to the complexity involved in pin pointing a single definition raised from the fact that the term victim holds multiple meanings in contemporary scholarly, political and legal discourses. Exploring the concept of victimhood from the view point of a marginalized group in this case Shi'i Muslims diaspora in Canada will provide a substantial new insight and focus into understanding and defining the religious and political aspects of victimhood.

In the third chapter I analyze the politics of [mis]recognition in relation to identity politics. Exploring this particular topic in relation to political theory, the works of Wendy Brown (Brown, 1995) and Charles Taylor (Taylor, 1994) provide an important theoretical framing. Brown provides one of the most cited and theoretically important analyses of victimhood in relation to being 'wounded'; Taylor's theory of recognition and misrecognition is useful not only to provide a different theory of being 'wounded' by the dominant culture but also on the construction of self, based on this dialogical politics. The reason why this can be a significant research in the field of victimhood is because it will assess whether, religious beliefs enforce the idea of victimhood or is victimhood caused by socio-political circumstances; and if it is, how do diasporic communities respond to it or overcome it? In examining the role of victimhood on identity formation of the Shi'i Muslim diaspora in Canada I aim to discover how victimhood affects civic engagement and equitable participation. For Charles Taylor, one of the leading theorists of recognition and misrecognition, a direct relation exists between recognition and identity. Taylor insists that in order to understand who we are we have to have a notion of how we have become and where we are going (Taylor, 1994). It is this idea of how we have become that this research will explore. In order to achieve political transformation and justice we need to go beyond the recognition of suffering and the acknowledgment of

victimization. As Brown argues, the focus on the victimized identity is not an empowering notion and in fact it is an obstacle that needs to be fixed. Brown argues that victimized identity is essentially locked into a binary logic of victim and perpetrator which ultimately sabotage its political agency (Brown, 1995, p. 22). In this research I aim to explore this issue of finding agency amidst marginalization by focusing on how it happens and what motivates such response. This research seeks to examine the degree to which Taylor's model of misrecognition applies to Shi'i Muslims and how this impacts their own sense of collective identity and also to examine whether the position of 'I am the victim' interferes with the 'I want this for us' politics. Would it make sense, in order to be fully recognized, to create an effective form of agency for change that through narratives and lived experiences never before shared Shi'i Muslim Canadians may achieve recognition. And can this be done without re-inscribing the injury as defined by Brown. If narratives and the personal experiences of these victims are collected this research can then find themes that are crucial and beneficial to understanding of victimhood and recognition.

The fourth chapter, "Equitable participation: a political responsibility and a religious duty" is divided into two sections: 4.1) explores motivations for civic engagement by examining the past, present and the future as the participants in this study define it in the context of their everyday and section 4.2) it is an exploration of civic engagement as a personal responsibility and a religious duty for this particular community in BC. In this chapter I argue that their political participation intends to increase visibility of their community among others by resisting and rejecting all forms of marginalization through their voluntary non-political activity, which is in itself motivated by a 'political spirituality' that

aims to resist any forms of oppression and marginalization. The stories that are shared by the participants, based on their lived experiences, will guide the themes of this chapter.

In the fifth chapter I discuss the main findings, contributions and the limitations of my work. I will also include a conclusion of my dissertation and will discuss whether further research is necessary on this particular research areas.

Chapter 2: Politics of Victimhood

Victimization and the Muslim Diaspora

The aftermath of September 11 created nothing short of senseless victimization of Muslims in public places, schools, in media representation along with the ongoing suspicions and surveillance in the name of national security and anti-terrorism in Canada (Khalema & Wannas-Jones, 2003) Europe and United states (Mythen, Walklate, & Khan, 2009). Experiences of harassment and racism fueled by anti-Muslim stereotype, and public misinformation in Canada increased in number significantly in the aftermath of September 11 and people of colour and whoever could be mistaken as being Middle Eastern were the recipient of these attacks¹⁸.

In fact, the Canadian hate crime unit task force reported that the greatest increase in racially and religiously motivated hate crime occurred in September and October of 2001 (Khalema & Wannas-Jones, 2003) indicating a sudden surge in anti-Muslim sentiment in Canada. Of course, Islamophobia and Muslim victimization did not come into existence post 9/11 as those have always existed, as Islamophobia is a product of racism (Zempi & Awan, 2016). Racial profiling, petty harassment and discrimination are a social reality for the people of colour and visible minorities in Canada and that is undeniable. Hate crimes against Muslims in Canada increased 253% from 2012 – 2015 according to Statistics Canada data as misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims in the media contributed to a substantial rise in intolerance against Muslims (Mythen et al., 2009). In response, Muslim activism, by

¹⁸ In her book, *“Casting Out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics”*, Sherene Razack, addressed the “othering” of the Muslims in post 9/11 period in the west with a special focus on Canada and the United States. She argues that special categories have been created within a climate of fear which intends to exclude groups of people from the rule of law and from the political community. This “eviction” as she calls it limits the fundamental rights of those who are identified as threats which are mainly from racialized communities, particularly the Muslims. In their depiction as a monolithic group they are ultimately taken out of their social, historical and political contexts which voids them of an independent agency. They are categorized as the undeserving ‘race’ which is the justification used for suspending their rights. (Razack, 2008)

scholars, students and activists have played a significant role in providing a counternarrative that aims to promote dialogue, born out of a desire to clear misconception and raising awareness about the misinformation and misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims (Zempi & Awan, 2016). As the result, there was a sudden growing literature on islamophobia post 9/11 which aimed to acknowledge and thoroughly examine and explore this social reality that has influenced the lived experiences of Muslims everywhere (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Mythen, Walklate, & Khan, 2009; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Shamma, 2009; Zempi & Awan, 2016).

Encountering explicit racial discrimination and verbal harassment in malls and other public spaces is nothing new to many Muslims, myself included, as I briefly referenced the many experiences I've had with such petty harassments in public spaces. Being a visible minority, a person of colour, an Arab, a Muslim woman in hijab, who has been called a "terrorist" in public by random strangers in the past, I understand the complexity of social identities and their overlapping nature and how that influences lived experiences of those on the receiving end. As Muslims in Canada, within our communities and social groups we speak of these painful lived experiences, we remember them, we share them among ourselves, we carry those experiences of victimization with us because they even infiltrate the comfort of our in-groups and togetherness, placing and forcing their ugliness into our comfort, because once they happen, they never leave. As instances of victimization lives on; "the memory and the story of what has happened and their meaning[...]instances of victimization become part of the fabric of a person's life story, of the unfolding narrative of life"(Pemberton, 2015, p. 23). In this chapter I argue that victimization is as such, it never leaves, and the experiences of victimization becomes part of the story that shapes one's identity, particularly for those with multi-layered identities as "being or becoming a victim is

not a neat or absolute journey. Acquiring the status of victim involves being party to a range of interactions and processes, including identification, labelling and recognition” (Mythen, 2007, p.466). The growing literature on Muslim victimization has made a significant contribution that has raised awareness about this important topic which has filled a much-needed gap in literature particularly in the West. However, as a Shi’i Muslim scholar, I have noticed the significant gap that remains when considering the experiences of Shi’i Muslim victimization that is often overlooked which continues to be one the of challenges that Shi’i Muslim diaspora in the West face (Takim, 2018; Takim, 2009) which is safe to argue is also related to the lack of self-representation in academia (Takim, 2018). As a Shi’i Muslim scholar, I acknowledge that I occupy a marginal space in academia in relation to both Western and Sunni Muslim scholars and the nuances of this particular marginalization corresponds to Liyakat Takim’s argument who is a leading Shi’i Scholar on Shi’i Islam in America, that Shi’i Muslims in North America experience tension based on their interactions with both the Western dominant culture as well as the majority of the Muslim society (Takim, 2009). My goal as a Shi’i Muslim scholar is to then shed light on the lived experiences of the members from the Shi’i Muslim diaspora to allow for their narratives of their lived experiences to emerge and also occupy a space in the scholarship which showcases their unique sense of victimization that needs further exploration.

To examine this further, let’s recall the personal experience that I shared in the introduction of this study from my undergraduate years. Just as many other young Muslims, post 9/11 and the rampant Islamophobia, was one of the main reasons many of my friends and I decided to join student Muslims clubs on campus, both as a mean to raise awareness and clear misconception about Islam, as a counternarrative of what the media portrayed but

also our need for a sense of community and safety that many felt the need of sense of belonging to (Cole & Ahmadi, 2010; Degli Esposti & Scott-Baumann, 2019; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Shammass, 2009) this was the very same reason I wanted to take a part in such clubs on campus during my undergraduate studies as well. My personal experience of in addition to being a Muslim was the fact that I was a Shi'i Muslim, which added another layer to my identity, another layer that I had to provide a counternarrative to. Joining the Muslim Student Federation (MSF) which was the Shi'i Muslim student club after being told I did not belong to the Muslim Student Association (MSA) was my counternarrative. In her book *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*, Heldie Nelson, defines counternarratives as a "story that resists an oppressive identity" one that attempts to "replace it with one that commends respect"(Nelson, 2001, p.6) because counternarratives have the power to repair damaged identities (Nelson, 2001). Being an active member of the Shi'i Muslim student club (MSF) meant I was able to regain back the respect after my friend and I were rejected by the other Muslim student club (MSA). Subverting the negative phenomenon of marginalization and victimhood of that incident into active participatory work in the MSF was our form of resistance. Victimization had generated the desire to challenge and resist marginalization that we had faced, both as Shi'i Muslims in that context and Islamophobia more generally in light of the multi-layered oppression we experienced. Being an active member in MSF meant that I was able to reclaim the sense of self-respect and belonging that suddenly became so important to me. Identity, as Nelson (2001) describes it is the "interaction of a person's self-conception with how others conceive [one]: identities are the understanding we have of ourselves and others"(Nelson, 2001, p.6). Being an active member of MSF was the revised understanding of myself, a redeemed self-respect. Active participation in a Shi'i Muslim club

also meant a sense of belonging to a community that focused on resisting the negative notion of “othering” by the other Muslim club¹⁹. While promoting awareness and a counternarrative to all the media biases and stereotypes that misrepresented Islam and Muslims. In a recent study, based on 100 interviews, Jasmine Zine and Asma Bala, examined the social activism of Muslim students in connection to their membership in Muslim student associations in Canadian universities and highlighted the sense of marginalization that Shi’i students face as a minority sect (Zine & Bala, 2019); highlighting the double sense of marginalization that Shi’i Muslims face in higher education settings which has inspired them to create their own unique clubs (Khadour, 2016). As Tariq Modood, a sociologist who has conducted extensive research on Muslim ethnic and national identities argues, identity, particularly for younger second generation Muslims is ‘sometimes a religious revival , sometimes a political identity, sometimes both’(Modood, 1998, p.386). This is perhaps the most accurate depiction of what association with the Shi’i Muslim meant for me and others who joined the MSF.

It is precisely this sense of victimization that can generate agency and resist marginalization that this study aims to specifically look at, instances where passive notions of victimhood are substituted by active ones. The counternarratives of this particular community who have shared similar experiences to mine, ones that are caught in various forms of oppression. In this chapter I argue that victims have agency, they often have a political will and they actively give meaning to victimhood through various practices and for

¹⁹ For a detailed study of rise of Shi’i Muslim student activism on university campuses, see: article “*Fighting for “Justice”, Engaging the Other: Shi’a Muslim Activism on the British University Campus*”. Emanuelle Degli Esposti and Alison Scott-Baumann, conducted a thorough study on the growing profile of Shi’i student activism on university campuses between 2013-2018. They identify the rise in Shi’i student association in university campuses constitute a form of self-representation for the Shi’i students who feel marginalized within the university space as well as promoting a particular version of Shi’i Islam.

this particular study, there is a particular religious resistance to victim categorization that is worth examining. Exploring how victimhood is practiced, meaning how it is understood, “not as a natural but a social fact. Insofar as it needs to be explained by the sociality through which it is given meaning and the social structure in which such meaning is inscribed and encoded” (Arfman, Mutsaers & Hoondert, 2016, p. 3).

As a Shi’i Muslim researcher in Canada, I feel compelled to document the experiences of this marginalized group as part my commitment to my community and my religious identity and with this I acknowledge my own voice within the text. I also acknowledge there is a moral obligation that I have as a scholar, to provide an avenue to allow and create a space for the narratives of the Shi’i Muslims to be understood and heard within our society and provide a path to the diversity that exists while acknowledging the presence of the diverse Muslim identity in Canada by developing counternarrative voices that benefit our communities. In this research I aim to explore this issue of finding agency amidst marginalization which is rooted in how the participants in the study engage with the story of Karbala as a narrative in their everyday. I seek to explore how does it happen and what motivates such response.

2.1 Shi'i Identity and Politics of Victimhood

Perception, Symbolism and Representation

“...why do we have to fight to be included- I always have to prove myself that I am worthy of being included, that makes me feel sad- how much of my life am I [going to] spend on fighting for my right to be included in a community that I give back to all the time, that I grew up in? This is my community just as much it is anybody else's.” – (Malika, participant)

Attending a conference in 2016 on the role of religious leader engagement at the Canadian Forces College in Toronto, I was asked by a high-ranking member of the military about my research focus. In that conversation, he asked “whether Shi'i Muslim victimhood can manifest itself in a violent way in Canada?”. This was a question that I had never asked or thought about. I had a strange, *guilty*, appreciation for that question, one that stemmed from the acknowledgment that victimhood was attributed to this community, because for me, at that point in life, Shi'i Muslims were a marginalized minority in various parts of the world. So, for me, being asked such an absurd question, by a retired military officer who had served many years of his life working on interfaith peacebuilding and dialogue in various parts of the world meant a certain kind of reassurance that others also knew about this sense of victimhood of Shi'i Muslims. Perhaps that appreciation is similar to Ian Buruma's experience going through the museum at Auschwitz where he began to encounter a joyous celebration of being a victim, that there was an acknowledgment that his Jewishness is shaped by “the sentimental solidarity of remembered victimhood” (Buruma, 1999, p. 3). My other sense of appreciation for the question I was asked was knowing that my research aimed to steer away from the dangerous assumption that victimhood always bred vengeance. I remember my answer focused on my insistence that there is a need to distinguish between victim and victimhood and how that led to a long discussion that involved history, politics and personal narratives of who I am and

what I see myself as. That question became a long discussion that heavily involved some of the most personal lived experiences both in Canada and abroad, a dichotomy of ‘here’, as in Canada, and ‘there’, as in back-home, a common theme with diasporic identities.

This encounter made me think of the complexities involved in defining my own complex Shi’i Muslim Canadian identity. In about an hour-long discussion I found myself covering historical narratives, current political tension in the Arab world, remembrance, storytelling, resistance, collective identity and the arduous efforts to simply be, to co-exist with others, as equals. My response to his question left him surprised at the complexities and left me exhausted, and burdened to define the complex and multi-layered nature of victimhood while paying close attention to the intricate meaning of the concept, carefully focusing on the distinction that exists; that the concept victim “implies suffering whereas victimhood is a political construction” (Ronsbo & Jensen, 2014, p. 1). Indeed, this is the distinction I make in this dissertation, that victimhood in itself is a constructed and complex component of identity, it is political by nature but not violent or vengeful; it has the potential to create agency and action depending on the context that gives such an identity meaning, its subjects and what their motivations and convictions are built up on. My long and detailed response also highlighted for me that the ‘personal is political’ when it comes to defining Shi’i identities, everywhere, even within transnational context, recognizing that the political was inevitable in defining my own identity.

In the introduction, I stated that victimhood is understood in this context as a political construct, as inherently political (Jacoby, 2015). Recent scholarship also view victims and victimhood as culturally imbedded and constructed (Hoondert, Mutsaers, & Arfman, 2018). Scholars from variety of disciplines have contributed to a growing body of

literature on victimhood, its legal definition (Wilke, 2007), its cognitive aspects (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009), its collective form (Schori-Eyal, Halperin, & Bar-Tal, 2014) its social construction (Siniver, 2012), its relation to human rights (Meister, 2002), violence (Enns, 2012) and its inclusive (Yildiz & Verkuyten, 2011) and exclusive (Ballinger, 2004) forms.

However, the dominant image held of the victims is one with a passivity assigned to them (Quinney, 1972), often described as ones who are generally considered the ‘scarified ones’ who lack any kind of agency, which has created a naïve and simplistic view of the role of victim as this orientation is rather an individualist, passive and a static categorization (Hoondert et al., 2018; Quinney, 1972). Recent victimology scholarship has pointed out the need to embrace a radical counternarrative that engages with victims as social actors who are able to wield agency and shape how they experience victimization rather than helpless people who have had things done to them (Green & Pemberton, 2018) turning away from passive and static view of victimhood where in this case the victim is viewed as a sovereign rather than a subject (Green & Pemberton, 2018; Hoondert et al., 2018; Quinney, 1972).

Victimology scholarship has failed to engage with the question of impact that victimization has upon people’s lives as there tends to be a failure to understand and explore the core essence of the victim experience based on their lived experience and how they exercise control over it if they choose to do so (Green & Pemberton, 2018). The individual experiences of suffering and marginalization each brings a unique voice of those who actively give meaning to victimhood through various practices.

Recent scholarship invites researchers to explore the impact of victimization on individual or particular groups thorough case-to case basis as it varies in each case. Political theorist Judith Shklar argues:

Victimhood has an irreducibly subjective component that the normal model of justice cannot easily absorb. If I am the victim of disappointed expectations, who is it say that I am or am not justified in holding them? Was there a rule, a custom, or an understanding, as I claim, or was there not? Should there have been one? Am I mistaken, dishonest, or right? Who is to decide? Is the victim, who is at a disadvantage-given that we are always unequal in some way- or the apparent beneficiary of [one's] condition to be trusted? That is not all. When social circumstances or ideological change create new expectations that run counter to all previous assumptions, who is to say what rules, if any, do or do not permit a group to feel victimized? [...]people simply differ enormously about what they feel personally to be unjust. We not only often refuse to recognize victims, but they are frequently not able or willing to present their grievances... there are more subtle reasons than fear and helplessness for refusing to be an overt victim and they are often politically very important, especially for members of ascriptive groups. (Shklar, 1990, p.37-38)

In this overview of victimhood, I aimed to briefly showcase how victimhood has been studied from many different angles and in this study, I aim to bring new insight with respect to victimhood and its narratives, particularly for the members of the Shi'is diaspora who have participated in his study. Exploring how victimhood is understood and practiced and experienced through the lens of commemorative rituals and remembrance of Karbala through the narratives of the participants in this study brings a unique voice and perspective to the study of victimhood in relation to the use religious resistance to their victim categorization. One that explains how victimhood is defined and contextualized in the everyday life of politicized identities; how does it transform from a state of hopelessness into a collective identity that seeks recognition (Jacoby, 2015) and how does it act, if it could and when it could, as a source for mobilization for marginalized groups (Stone-Mediatore, 2003).

In the introduction I started by sharing a story about what month of *Muharam* and mourning and what those narrative recitation meant to me as a young girl. That performativity

and insistence on holding on those religious events were part of who I was, to be a good Shi'i Muslim meant attending those sessions and listening to the message of Hussein as it was meant to show how to live a life that is rooted in seeking justice no matter the cost because after all, Hussein was killed for what he stood up for, justice, which is also a central doctrine²⁰ in Shi'i theology. That was the message I grew up with as a Shi'i Muslim. Those messages and those teachings were meant to show how a pious Shi'i Muslim should live life, with a principle of standing up for justice, similar to the life Hussein lived, with a cause as "Shi'ism is rooted in the concept of standing up to injustice and oppression"(Takim, 2018, p.83).

To put this simply, for Shi'i Muslims the doctrine of victimhood is incarnated in narrative of martyrdom of Hussein in Karbala, one that was transformed from an "originary myth of Shi'ism into a mobilizing narrative of political struggle and self-sacrifice" (Khalili, 2007, p. 27). In this chapter I aim to highlight those distinctions, between a victimhood that is invested in mourning and grief and one that has risen from inaction to active agency by waving the narratives of the participants of this study as they share their experiences of double-marginalization as Shi'i Muslims here in Canada.

In her important work, *Five Faces of Oppression*, Iris Young, writes about the danger of marginalization, calling it "perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression"(Young, 1988, p.281) she makes a compelling argument that marginalization causes "a whole category of people [to be] expelled from useful participation in social life"(Young, 1988, p.281). In this light, I aim to explore further this imposed marginal status on this particular community and the ways they are collectively resisting such forms of oppression in their everyday as they

²⁰ The five Shi'i principles of religion (*Usul Al-din*) which are divine unity or the oneness of God (*Tawhid*), Prophethood (*Nobouwa*), Justice (*Adl*) and the role of the Imams (*Iamamah*) and resurrection (Ma'ad). For a detailed theological account of the Shi'i principles of religion see: (Mavani, 2013; Sachedina, 1988).

define victimhood within the Canadian multicultural context; whose agency and social mobilization, action and their level of political participation is embedded in a web of complex multi-layered dynamics. The members of this community continue to incorporate the Karbala paradigm²¹ as a mean for their quest for recognition and political participation within the larger Muslim community as well as the Canadian context. In that light, this chapter will focus on the idea of victimhood as defined and articulated through the narratives of the participants in this study. Allowing for the emergence of a creative and nuanced way to understand victimhood in ways that make sense to the participants themselves as they weave the story of Karbala in their everyday to create new and transformative meaning to victimization.

2.2 Victimhood in Historical Context: Shi'i Identity and the *States of Injury*

While the religious and political Sunni- Shi'i divide including the specific details from the early days of Islam and its complex evolution, are far beyond the scope of this dissertation, a brief historical synopsis, from a Shi'i Twelver's perspective is crucial for understanding the complexities of this particular research focus, particularly as it relates to the context of the participants' lived experiences. These complexities arise due to the nature of how identity for Shi'i Muslims, particularly the participants of this study, incorporate historical moments, as defining feature of their communal life, as a force to move forward, inspiration to act and the need to be recognized in order to be included. In here, I am challenging the idea that victimhood is synonymous with powerlessness and weakness, its insistence on fixity of position, that leaves no space for the creative transformation for agency (Brown, 1995). I argue that

²¹ The term Karbala Paradigm is used in accordance with Michael Fischer's usage in *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

victimhood, when properly positioned and worked up on, can guide the action of the collective to seek recognition even among those who are culturally marginalized; who are “outsiders within” the dominant culture (Hill Collins, 1986, p. 14).

An integral component of the Shi'i sacred thought is the concept of *Mazlumiya*²² or *Madhlomiyah* which literally means ‘having been wronged’ or ‘oppressed unjustly’. The root of *Mazlumiya* or *Madhlomiyah* is *Zulm (dhulm)*, which means injustice or oppression, and the person who has been wronged, or is subjected to injustice and oppression is referred to as *Mazlum (Madhlum)*. Therefore, *Mazlumiya* or *Madhlomiyah* is a condition of being helplessly in an unjust state where one is subjected to tyranny and injustice, innocently (Dabashi, 2011). The concept of *Madhlomiyah* is very similar to Iris Young’s definition of oppression as a “phenomena that immobilize or reduce a group”(Young, 1988, p. 273). For example, one of the way Hussein is often referred to, in religious literature, slogans, protests and stories is *Hussein-e- Madhlum* or *Mazlom Hussien* which translates to Hussein the oppressed. This condition is deeply imbedded in the concept of innocence, which implies that the person who has been wronged is helpless and innocent so the condition of *Mazlumiya* or *Madhlomiyah* inherently adapts that the person who has been wronged is innocent and helpless (K. Aghaie, 2001). As a principle doctrine within Shi’i thought the historical trauma, beginning with the Sunni-Shi’i divide and even more importantly, the battle of Karbala, a political phenomenon, has been integral to the Shi'i sacred imagination.

According to the Shi’i narratives the idea of *Zulm* within the Shi’i context, appeared right after the death of Muhammed and it continues to exist to this very day. Shi’ism is founded on a perceived political injustice, a wrong that was never righted, not with Ali and not with

²² Madhlumiya is the Arabic word and Mazlumiya is a Persian version of the same concept and both are used interchangeably.

Hussein and it continues to this day. As it was discussed in the earlier chapter, Shi'i Islam is a minority sect which makes up between ten to fifteen percent of world's Muslim population. Almost half of that population is concentrated in Iran which is arguably the most influential Shi'i nation in the world, today. Other concentrations of Shi'i Muslims are in Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, India, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and part of South Asia (K. Aghaie, 2001). The roots of the Sunni- Shi'i divide which occurred immediately following the death of Prophet Mohammed in 632 CE, lies in the crisis of succession. One of the biggest challenges following Muhammed's death for the young Muslim community was the line of succession. A minority group believed that the prophet, prior to his death had selected Ali, his son-in-law to be his successor on more than one occasion²³. In Shi'i narratives, the descent of Ali and the prophet's daughter, Fatimah, beginning with their two sons, Hassan and Hussein, were infallible and had special religious knowledge, highly pious and of impeccable moral character and qualities (Bengio & Litvak, 2014). The line of succession therefore was to be in an unbroken line of succession leading back to the Prophet. The institution of leadership that eventually evolved from this view was called the "imamate" and those who opposed that narrative following the death of Prophet Muhammed decided to elect a representative for the Muslim community known as a Caliph who held both religious and leading authority. This second ruling institution that evolved out of this crisis after the death of Muhamad was called

²³ Shi'i Muslims believed that the Prophet, before his death, selected Ali as his successor on more than one occasion. For example, they believed that shortly before his death the Prophet gave a speech, at a place called Ghadir Khom, in which he raised Ali's hand and stated as follows: We were with the Apostle of God in his journey and we stopped at Ghadir Khom. We performed the obligatory prayer together and a place was swept for the Apostle under two trees and he performed the midday prayer. And then he took Ali by the hand and said to the people: "Do you not acknowledge that I have greater claim on each of the believers than they have on themselves?" And they replied: "Yes!" And he took Ali's hand and said: "Of whomsoever I am Lord, then Ali is also his Lord. O God! Be thou the supporter of whoever supports Ali and the enemy of whoever opposes him." And Umar met him [Ali] after this and said to him: "Congratulations, O son of Abu Talib! Now morning and evening [i.e., forever] you are the master of every believing man and woman."-This hadith is reported by the famous Sunni traditionalist Ahmad Ibn Hanbal in his collection Musnad. This translation is provided by Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985).

the “caliphate”(Dabashi, 2011).

Within the Shi’i narratives, the Shi’i imams, Muhammed’s progeny, beginning with Ali had a degree of popular support among the masses and were often associated with political opposition. Shi’i Islam therefore, from early on took the form of opposition movement that challenged the legitimacy of the caliphate and in particular, during the Umayyad dynasty (661-750). The Shi’i school of thought to this day regards the Umayyad Caliphate as the most religious corrupt and political oppressive period. It is during this period that the battle of Karbala occurred, which has to this date, been the “root metaphor²⁴” and the guiding principle for the Shi’i Muslims. Throughout the early period of Islam, and particularly after the death of Muhammad, political and religious division began to manifest themselves immediately. These division however intensified particularly during the Umayyad dynasty 680 CE following the battle of Karbala, during the reign of Yazid, the second Umayyad’s caliph (K. S. Aghaie, 2005).

What also needs to be highlighted in this context, is the shift that has been taking place historically as well as politically around the concept of *Zulm* or oppression within the Shi’i political thought where conviction and strong religious belief come together to define and sustain its meaning. In placing this idea in context, I will reference the revolution in 1979 in Iran as an example of that school of Shi’i Twelvers doctrine of resistance in the face of oppression and political thought. With more than half of the world’s Shi’i population concentrated in Iran, religious leadership, in the prelude to the Islamic revolution of 1979 used religious symbols effectively to motivate the Iranian masses against the Shah’s regime. One of

²⁴ Karbala or the Master Narrative is a perfect example of what Stephen Pepper call ‘root metaphor’For a detailed discussion on ‘root metaphor’ see Pepper, Stephen Coburn (1942). *World Hypotheses a Study in Evidence*. University of California Press.

the most important sets of symbols used in this oppositional political discourse was the Karbala paradigm (Fischer, 2010). Where the politicized interpretation equated the Iranian masses with Hussein and those who died with him in Karbala- and the Shah, and his regime, with Yazid to illustrate a corrupt leadership. It was during this particular time where the Karbala narrative and Hussein's rebellion began to take a more active political purpose (K. Aghaie, 2001). Karbala narrative not only became a symbolic mobilization force against a tyrant ruler, but it evolved to be a symbol of resistance and mobilization for the oppressed, wherever they may be.

Karbala paradigm became a relative and flexible set of symbols that evolved in accordance with the changing political trends. The Karbala narrative was no longer a tool-kit for the religious leaders to mobilize but it became a source of inspiration of anti- imperialist and anti-colonialist thought, particularly in Iran (El Hussein, 2010). Among the most influential Shi'i thinkers of 1960 was Dr. Ali Shariati, an Iranian anti-colonialist scholar, who was often described as the 'ideologue' and 'architect' of the revolutionary movement in Iran (K. Aghaie, 2001), whose thoughts and writings continue to find new audiences and influence social and political and intellectual debates even today within Shi'i communities everywhere. He was mainly known for his critical thoughts towards Western hegemony, his harsh critique of Westernization and Eurocentric modernization. The focus of his work was the importance of raising the consciousness of the masses by combining his political message of rebellion against tyranny and Western hegemony with a modern reinterpretation of traditional Islamic doctrine particularly Islamic theology and narrative, especially the story of Hussein, to develop a revolutionary ideology that called for action, agency and popular movement in the face of oppression and injustice (Gholizadeh & Hook, 2012). While he

considered himself a secular scholar, his writing “... utilized religious metaphors and allegories to popularize the conception of a political religion concerned first and foremost with fighting social and political injustice” (Gholizadeh & Hook, 2012, p. 177)

In his observation of the Iranian revolution of 1979, Michel Foucault argued that Shariati’s presence, even following his death, which was two years prior to the 1979 revolution, continued to be present in all political and religious life (Afary & Anderson, 2004) in Iran. Shariati’s work was not limited to the revolutionary movement but he was also known for his revolutionary stance on a wide range of issues such as the transition to democracy and secularism, gender equality, citizenship rights as well as the “renegotiation of individual and collective identity in the face of ongoing debasement of traditional sources of identity” (Saffari, 2017, p. 17). For Shariati a radical change and transformation in the political domain did not only require a change in power structure but rather a deep change in the consciousness of the masses by incorporation of a grounded discourse like that of Hussein in Karbala. Shariati’s significant influence in forming and mobilizing the popular uprising gave him, according to Foucault, “an iconic position so privileged in Shi’ism, of the invisible present, of the ever-present absent²⁵” (Thompson, 2005). The Karbala paradigm after the Iranian revolution, began to shift from resisting the oppressor to the modern day of resisting the invader. This was also demonstrated recently during the rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria (Linge, 2016) and the consequences of the sectarian tension in the Middle East. In places where the Shi’i majority is concentrated, the symbolic representation of Karbala paradigm is ever present.

²⁵ Excerpt from pages 203-9 of *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* by Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, published by the University of Chicago Press. First published in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, October 16-22, 1978.

Once again, this dimension of the geopolitical conflict is well beyond the scope of this thesis, however, it is important to note that the symbolic representations of Karbala paradigm has also found its way in the small communities of Shi'i diasporic communities worldwide (Ali, 2019; Alibhai, 2018; Scharbrodt, 2011; Shanneik, 2015; Tabar, 2003). Recent studies within the migratory context, that have explored Shi'i diasporic communities in Europe (Ali, 2019; Alibhai, 2018; Bøe & Flaskerud, 2017; Chatziprokopiou, Marios, Hatziporkopiou, 2017; Degli Esposti, 2018; Linge, 2016; Rosland, 2009; Scharbrodt, 2011; Shanneik, 2015), Australia (Tabar, 2003) and the United States (Schubel, 2006; Liyakat Takim, 2018), have also demonstrated the significance of the story of Karbala as a source of identity formation and agency. Illustrating the shift from passive victimhood to active victimhood is now ever present in every Shi'i community diaspora as well. In this section I aim to explore the way such communities organize and identify themselves and how the 'new' Karbala paradigms are adapted in social, political and religious discourses are modified in relation to the contemporary political and social discourse within this Shi'i diaspora in BC. Where helplessness and the feeling of despair has shifted to a need to act. Brown has called this sense of helplessness or powerlessness of politicized identity a 'state of injury'. Brown's notion of a politicized identity constructed by its inability to move past injuries shapes identity politics as the "politicized identity thus enunciates itself, makes claims for itself, only by entrenching, restating, dramatizing, and inscribing its pain in politics; it can hold out no future-for itself or others-that triumphs over this pain" (Brown, 1995, p.74). The narratives gathered from the participants in this study, reveal precisely this shift from the inability to move past injuries to making a claim for themselves and the shift from the personal pronoun "I" to "us", and from individual being to communal and the collective action, the finding of their own voices among

many others by exposing all factors that have marginalized them to claim a place for their community among others, with a single historical narrative that continues to guide their action; the Karbala Paradigm (Arjomand, Akhavi, & Fischer, 1982).

2.3 The Karbala Paradigm: A Call for Action

The story of Karbala took place in 680 CE in a desert region of southern Iraq. According to Shi'i narratives, Yazid is portrayed as a morally corrupt and politically oppressive ruler and Hussein refused to give an oath of allegiance to him while the Muslim community were suffering under his unjust and cruel rule. Hussein traveled to Iraq to lead the uprising against Yazid. He began the journey from Medina to Iraq with a number of his close relatives and companions. His caravan, midway, was surrounded by an overwhelming large army sent by Yazid to crush the rebellion and to force Hussein for allegiance, Hussein refused and his refusal led to the final battle that took place where Hussein along with his family members and close companions were killed in a brutal fashion. The sole survivors from Hussein's household in this event were his ill son Ali Zeyn al-Abedin and his sister Zeinab. The women and the children along with the heads of the martyrs which were placed on spears were then transported to Yazid's court in Damascus. Zeinab became the storyteller who confronted Yazid in his courtyard in Damascus with her speech that is very present in the Shi'i historical narratives that is also retold every year during the commemoration of the battle of Karbala. Zeinab's speech focused heavily on the idea of remembrance and memory. "[...] *By God, you shall never be able to erase our memories or wipeout our inspiration [...]*"²⁶ a

²⁶ Zeinab, as the spokesperson following the battle of Karbala, gave a sermon at the courtyard of Yazid following the Battle of Karbala, her sermon is available online but for this particular translation I have looked at the work of Mohammad Mohammadi Eshthehardi, *Hazrat-e Zeynab, payam resan-e shahidan-e Karbala* (Tehran: Nashr-e Motahhar, 1997) also found in Aghaie, K.S. (2004). *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*. Seattle: University of Washington 128-130.

historical narration that makes itself presents as a ‘promise kept’ in every congregation that commemorate the story of Karbala and Hussein every year. Within this Shi’i narrative, in this story, Yazid represents the ultimate tyrannical villain for his treatment of the descendent of the Prophet Mohammed. Hussein on the other hand is represented to Shi’i Muslims as a symbol of piety, courage and truth who fought for justice against the rule of tyranny.

The Karbala paradigm (Arjomand et al., 1982) , as coined by Michael Fischer, has become a symbol of resistance and rebellion against the rule of tyranny for the Shi’i Twelvers. Karbala’s symbolism became the beacon for many rebellions including the overthrow of the Umayyad’s by the Abbasids dynasty in (749-50). The story of Karbala and the sacrifice of Hussein became the popular sentiment that continues to reverberate throughout the Shi’i communities around the world.

Karbala’s symbolism and Hussein’s sacrifice has become ever present and a point of reference for all popular preaching to overcome injustice and tyranny (K. S. Aghaie, 2004) – where the narrative of Karbala has the political potential to clothe contemporary discontent to this very day (Fischer, 2010). For Shi’i Muslims, Karbala, has become a narrative that reinforces itself as the most vital form of mobilization and resistance movement discourse (Davis, 2002).

The influence that the historical narratives have on the Shi’i identity formation both in terms of the political and personal life is immense. The connection and the influence of historical narratives especially that of Hussein in Karbala is ever present in the everyday lives of the Shi’i Muslims regardless of where they are in the world. A sense of common identity that has formed a transnational identity; one that is rooted in commemoration and remembrance and this idea will be thoroughly examined in the narratives of the participates of this study. Karbala in itself can be seen as a school of thought, one that evokes ideas of sacrifice,

commitment to a cause and passion (El Hussein, 2010) which has, over the years, evolved from passive remembrance of Hussein, as the *Mazlum*, to an active form of resistance in the recent years.

Going back to the narrative of Karbala, the idea of *Zulm* and innocence are ever apparent. Yazid, in the Shi'i narratives is the absolute personification of tyranny, and Hussein represents the revolutionary ideal character who revolts against *Zulm*. The critical concept that appears in in the context of Karbala, is that *Zulm* and revolt are thematically related, that tyranny should not be tolerated and must be resisted even if it requires one to sacrifice all for the cause. With Karbala, as the guiding doctrinal principle, in the Shi'i political culture, injustice must be faced with revolt and resistance and since there is always injustice, there must always be a revolt and resistance and therefore an ongoing need for agency to act.

2.4 Stories of Self: Being a Shi'i Muslim in Canada

Exploring the theme of victimhood is no easy task, especially when conducting interviews. Semi-structured interviews, as a technique within narrative inquiry, seemed to be the best possible option that acknowledged the complexity and the sensitivity of the topic. I wanted to learn about lived experiences of the research participants, their stories that shape their identities. I was interested in all of their stories, the ones from their everyday, the personal ones, their small stories. My question²⁷ was simple, tell me about what Shi'i identity means to you. That question was answered in so many exciting ways, from small personal stories of their everyday in their community centre to big, full-blown, stories of their past 'back home'.

²⁷ To fulfil the objective of this study, my central question was 'tell me about what Shi'i identity means to you?' At times, in order to further the conversation, I asked the following sub-questions: a) What does it mean to you to be a Shi'i Muslim? b) How do you see yourself as a Shi'i Muslim in Canada? c) How does your identity as a Shi'i Muslim in Canada differs from your Shi'i identity in your country of origin?

Some shared too much details of particular incidents, some shared too little because they were careful with what and how much they shared, some opened up with general conversations and as time went by shared the most intricate and personal details. I wanted to allow my research participants “to construct answers in ways they find meaningful” (Riessman, 2008, p. 24). In the case of the participants, this was done by their stories of the past, present and their hope for the future about who they are and who they want to be in light of experiences of marginalization their multi-layered identities continue to face. At times they moved quickly from one story to another, the transition and the shifts from one context to another was intriguing to me, how they defined their sense of self, as a diasporic community, in relation to ‘here’ and ‘there’ meaning Canada and their respective home countries. I found that meaning-making within their stories captivating as how their identities are constructed in this context. I aim to share their stories as they were told to me, I want others to read and stay and resonate and think with these stories, not about them (A. Bochner & Riggs, 2014), and think of ways we can challenge or change the marginalization that minorities face within our own communities.

On the relational dimension of narratives, Riessman writes how narratives “invite us as listeners, readers, and viewers to enter the perspective of the narrator. Interrogating how a skilled storyteller pulls the reader/listener into the story world-and moves us emotionally through imaginative identification- is what narrative analysis can do” (Riessman, 2008, p. 9). I was able to notice their emotional attentiveness, their excitement to be included in this study. We chose locations to meet that they wanted, places that they were most comfortable in, coffee shops, offices, the community centre itself. I wanted to make sure they knew that I was there because their stories and lived experiences mattered.

This research began with the exploration of politics of victimhood, but it evolved into a study where politics of fear, resistance and agency found their way in, highlighting that in this particular context, one could not exist without the other. The stories shared in this chapter are the cornerstone of this study, where each participant shared intricate details about who they are with me in the most vulnerable sense. Those stories involved stories of courage, fear, resistance and hope that will guide this chapter. The details of their accounts, their stories, uncensored, were so raw and true in the moment they shared them that for many fear was displayed after my recorder was turned off. Of course this sense of fear and secrecy within Shi'ism is not surprising as historical and political persecution historically led them to develop a method of secrecy by which they concealed revealing their Shi'i identity as a method of survival (Dakake, 2006). The excerpts that will be shared in this dissertation are told by those who asked not to be named because they were afraid for the safety of their children back home. As one of the research participants who is an educator was especially careful with her confidentiality as well as her Shi'i self-identification because she was worried about her son who lives away for work, a country with a Sunni majority and a Shi'i minority:

[...]where he is now, he lives like a Sunni Muslim and doesn't disclose his identity at all, as there would be a threat to his life- he would never disclose it[...]

And those who feared losing their job – in a private Islamic School in Canada- if their identity was revealed:

[...]if they find out I am a Shi'i? I don't disclose- I am looking for that day where I can openly disclose I am a Shi'i – I don't know what the reaction would be – especially at this school- it's something you don't disclose I don't know why- you don't want to

make a big deal- when you are a minority you want to protect yourself a little bit- I don't know[...]

The young man, an active member of the community, a proud Canadian as he called himself who has lived almost all of his life in Canada defined the difficulty to 'fit-in':

[back home] you get picked on for being a Shi'i then you come here and you get picked on for being a Muslim, so for my family it's always been keep your head down, don't get involved, because you want to save yourself[...]

The hardworking activist and a community organizer, who took a very special pride in her Canadian-ness and her active charitable work who spoke of the pain of lack of recognition by both the larger Muslim community as well as the rest of the society, in light of her multi-layered identity of being a Shi'i Muslim woman of colour who wears the hijab:

[...]why do we have to fight to be included- I always have to prove myself that I am worthy of being included, that makes me feel sad- how much of my life am I [going to] spend on fighting for my right to be included in a community that I give back to all the time, that I grew up in? This is my community just as much it is anybody else's.

Others were overjoyed knowing that their stories mattered. Those who called me as soon as they saw the posting for this study on the notice board of the community centre. Those that were excited that a Shi'i Muslim researcher was conducting this study as well as those that contacted me a day after asking to be withdrawn because fear was too real back-home were all part of the process. Those who called me after to ask about confidentiality of this research again and again reinforced the idea that their stories should be shared and told, but anonymously. This study never intended to tap into those emotions but somehow this turned to be the case.

2.5 The Shi'i Narratives: Past, Present and the Future

There is something very particular in the stories of the participants in this study, the histories of victimhood in relation to their lived experiences, their definition of self and how victimhood is contextualized in their everyday. In acknowledging the salience of victimhood and how this particular community come together “with governing rationalities and experience of suffering to produce the terrains where ever-changing histories of victimhood come into existence” (Ronsbo & Jensen, 2014, p. 2), my aim is to explore the experience-oriented narratives of this particular community as they tell politics like a story – and to explore the problems that burden the narration of their experiences as a marginalized group.

In the case of this Shi'i Muslim community, marginal experience narratives, stemming from a historical narrative, contribute to the political thinking and political life in Canada precisely in the form of “stories of resistance” (Stone-Mediatore, 2003, p. 113) whose meaning is realized in their interpretation. I argue that the stories shared here “stimulate and enrich” (Stone-Mediatore, 2003, p. 5) political thought within the multicultural context of Canada. By paying attention to their narratives and the details of their struggle, their survival and how they make sense of their marginalization and how they see and acknowledge those who ignore them or their marginalization; as well as the ways they have taken up new roles to challenge that status quo of marginalization. Acknowledging that narrative is a vital form of their social movement discourse and crucial to their collective identity.

Stories have a unique function of their own, “they are not a replacement for theory or empirical data, but that which can sensitize us to an untheorized human significance of political phenomena” (Stone-Mediatore, 2003, p. 67) by fostering a continual and inclusive discussion of the political (Bierstedt & Arendt, 1959). Their stories encourage critical and political

discussion because stories “at least when they present themselves as stories, make a claim about the world without ending debate”(Stone-Mediatore, 2003, p. 62), as it is only when historical phenomenon are narrated they could be thoughtfully and collectively be confronted (Bierstedt & Arendt, 1959) and one is able to act upon them. It is also important to highlight that the experiences of communities in marginalized positions consist of not only identity politics and how it is perceived but also experiences of the world from specific positions within it that could offer new perspectives on understating justice and agency in this particular context. Their stories invite us, as readers, to see how this community works and uses resources in their daily lives to challenge the discourse and the institutions that keep them in marginalized positions. This research explores how as a community in BC, they do not seek to valorize the experience of marginalization or victimhood as the only possible truth but they tend to explore and investigate their lived experiences, their marginalization and their discontent into political consciousness (Stone-Mediatore, 2003). Ultimately, I will argue that their collective community work rooted in an inspiration taken from the story of Karbala holds the key to their transformation and quest for recognition.

Their narratives reveal that victimhood is rooted in the experience of marginalization but their mourning and commemoration of the Karbala narrative provides the social and collective act that binds and brings them together to reinforce a message that is rooted in historical and religious narratives that motivates action. The very act of lamentation that is embedded in the Karbala narrative focuses heavily on refusal and resistance, Hayhāt minnā l-dhilla²⁸, (never to a life of humiliation) is a phrase that is the principle theme of that

²⁸ Hayhāt minnā l-dhilla- in Arabic: (هَيَّاهَاتٍ مِنَّا الدُّلَّةُ) means "never to humiliation" is cited in the narrative of Shi'i tradition historically attributed to Hussien's famous quote on the day of Ashura in the Battle of Karbala.

narration. The battle of Karbala, a phenomena that has been integral to the Shi'i sacred imagination binds and reinforces the idea of communal unity (Buruma, 1999) ,which has also, in the face of injustice significantly contributed to the 'politicization of grieving' as well (Furedi, 1998). The story of Hussein is steeped in victimization, imbedded in anguish, loss, and tragedy. The details of the story aim to keep the sorrow alive, reinforcing the faithful mourner to never forget its significance. The mournful remembrance does not end within those ten days of annual event, in fact, Shi'i Muslims refrain from joyous events or festivities, birthdays are usually postponed; so are weddings and celebrations as a sign of respect to Hussein and his family. This remembrance of victimhood although it is imbedded within the narrative of Hussein but to Shi'i Muslims it has also become the source of their inspiration in the face of injustice, remembrance is a form of resistance, as it keeps the memory of Hussein alive, with the same intensity over time.

In Hannah Arendt's *Human Condition*, she argues that stories respond to the essence of political phenomenon even when stories are culturally informed and are based on creative constructions (Arendt, 1958). There is an intellectual value of stories especially those stories that are used by their historical situated-ness, those stories are vital to understanding the depth and the complexity of particular communities and it is crucial to pay attention to the relationship between narratives and political thinking, and the contribution of narrative to understanding the human experience (Ricoeur, 1980) especially in the case of Shi'i Muslim diaspora. The narratives shared by the participants in this study, illustrate how storytelling, grounded in grievance and remembrance of the 'chosen trauma' (Volkan, 2001) is central to the everyday practices in which they formulate community-situated claims about the political world as well as their quest for recognition. Their stories collectively defend an approach that

people who are excluded from the public discourse, who are expelled from social-cooperation (Young, 1988) and equitable citizenship can use marginal experience narrative to develop agency to redefine and rearticulate identity and history in ways more responsive to their struggles.

In exploring the complex grievance-based identity (Jacoby, 2015) of this community the goal is to attempt to articulate a theory of victimhood in lights of the myriad of complexities that this particular community in Canada face. This community, continues, arduously, to make itself present- among other communities, as ‘a minority within a minority’ (Eisenberg & Spinner-Haley, 2005) in Canada. Their narratives and their lived experiences inform us that the Shi’i/Sunni divide that has been reverberating across the Arab world, which has made headlines in global politics, especially in recent years, has also found a way to present itself here in Canada more than ever before.

2.6 Contextualizing Victimhood in the Shi’i Community in B.C.

As a Shi’i Muslim living in BC for the duration of my research, I was not an active member of this community but in my role as a Refugee Resettlement Officer, working with newly arrived Syrian refugees in Vancouver, I got to work closely with many of the members of this community. As a researcher, I was interested in the lived experiences of the members of this community who shared their personal stories with me. I was aware of the active role this community has in all the work they do whether it was their involvement with Food Bank, downtown East-Side of Vancouver or other community work. I was in awe of their dedication to their community. In 2016 as Canada opened its doors and welcomed Syrian refugees, many Canadians and religious associations began their charity and good will work to resettle families and provide them with the basics necessities that almost every newcomer

needs. As I was working as a Refugee Settlement officer in Vancouver, donations and help from every community began to pour in the center I was based in which was located in downtown Vancouver. In order to organize the donations and assistance everyone wanted to offer, there were guidelines put in place, where select community centres, particularly religious communities, would serve as a local point for all the help to be dropped off at their locations and only designated communities would later on drop off the items and donations to the locations where the Syrian families were staying at. This particular community began facing rejection as they dropped off their donations to the designated community centers, their help was faced with a rejection that their help was not needed. In a complete shock and disbelief, they contacted the centre where I was based, asking if they could deliver the items that they had put together as a community directly to the location, avoiding the main location for the drop off operated by another Muslim community organizers. Eventually that exception was made and they began dropping off the items that they had prepared directly to the locations where the families were staying without an intermediary organization since they were told that their help was unwelcomed. They asked to be contacted if there ever was a need to provide anything regardless of how short-notice the requests were. This was tested by the very location I was working at the time. Requests for everyday items, such as clothes, strollers, shoes, shavers, women hygiene products were made and this community delivered all that was requested by the newly arrived families, with no delays, within 48 hours as all this work was done collectively as the community came together to prepare the requested items. They mentioned to me how many members would volunteer and get together at the community centre and work on putting the requested items together which was why they were very quick in responding back with no delays.

I noticed their efforts, their willingness to help. I was intrigued by their insistence on helping others, and their steadfastness even when their help was ‘unwanted’ and ‘unwelcomed’ because they were Shi’i Muslims which I witnessed myself on various occasions. I was fascinated by their resilience and their inability to do nothing. The politics in Syria and the sectarian tension had transferred itself here. For this community, their names, which community they belonged to and what sect they followed became the obstacle to their efforts to donate and to help newly arrived families. In other words, the wider Muslim community would not accept help or support from Shi’i Muslims, on various occasions that I personally witnessed. They were told that their assistance was not welcomed and unwanted. During a time where Canada was making headline news with their efforts as they resettled refugees, fleeing war and oppression, this community just as countless others wanted to partake in this process, but marginalization that was imposed on them strictly because of their faith became a barrier to that social cooperation. As Young argues “processes that close persons out of participation in such social cooperation are unjust”(Young, 1988, p. 282) and for the Shi’i community in BC this was the case, to them this was an unjust sense of oppression and it was their responsibility as Shi’i Muslims and as Canadians to resist that sense of marginalization and unjust alienation. They knew however, resistance was not and could not be in form of a complaint, as no such thing exist when intragroup conflict happens, the only option was to persist and look for other ways to provide the assistance for those families in need.

This community’s work, their way of thinking, organizing and generosity despite opposition from so many other organizations was intriguing. Victimhood in the context of this study, was at times articulated as hardships faced in the everyday life and their marginalization by other Muslim communities. At times, victimhood, presented itself as a duty to act and be

involved and at times it was wrapped in fear; at times it was the single identifiable measure to their definition of who they were, and at times it was the sole purpose of , in the words of one of the research participants: “what can we do, to have a voice, to be, to be recognized and to exist”, referencing their denied effort as they attempted to help the newly arrived Syrian families by other Muslim communities.

In this research, I move beyond simply defining victims and victimhood, beyond suffering and a quest for sympathy or an apology to a new type of research that examines the myriad and complex ways in which victimhood is given shape in the ‘everyday’ and how it becomes the basis for politics and agency, as discussed above. This research is not meant to point fingers at perpetrators of violence or reduce people and their experiences as sole sufferer who cannot move beyond suffering but to explore the potential that politics of victimhood has in generating agency and resistance. The aim is not to dwell in defining who is the victim and what a victim looks like but to develop a nuanced understanding of politics of victimhood as it relates to Shi’i Muslim diaspora and their expression of identity in lights of the current intra-religious divide within the larger Muslim community, using this small community in Canada as my case study.

To understand victimhood as a political construct (Ronsbo & Jensen, 2014) within this community, it is necessary to understand the “diverse cultural practices in which ideas about victimhood are embedded” (Arfman, Mutsaers & Hoondert, 2016, p.14) and through which they are constantly constructed and re-constructed (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). The stories shared within this study are narratives of self, lived experiences, meaning, connotations and references just like theoretical concepts. These narratives shed light on how identity is constructed through stories (Nash, 1990) through the public sphere, as identity is “what the

self shows the world, what of the self is shown to the world and what of the self is recognized by the world” (Whitebrook, 2001, p. 4) which infers that identity is a product of the community one finds him/her self in (Taylor, 1993). These narratives inform us not only of how identity is constructed in light of victimhood but how storytelling can be seen as a mode of political explanation and political understanding.

In examining the role of victimhood on identity of this particular community I seek to examine how does that sense of agency emerges within those communities and if it does what perpetuates it? In this attempt I am looking for their lived experiences and the ways there are trying to find their own voices in a community with other voices. Das highlights a concept known as ‘agentive moment’, “finding one’s voice in making of one’s history[...]the remaking of the world is also a matter of being able to re-contextualize the narrative of devastation and generate new contexts through which everyday life may become possible ”(Das & Kleinman, 2001, p. 6). Where victimhood becomes an agentive concept that enables victims to move past their suffering. Das suggests that “the experience of subjugation may itself, when owned and worked upon, become the source for claiming a subject position”(Das & Kleinman, 2001,p. 7).

An idea that Brown proposes as well, the movement from the first person singular pronoun “I” to the claiming of a plural first person “us” is also critical to my analysis and interviews. By giving them a voice to tell their narratives of victimhood and what it entails, they are able to express their collective agency and become part of the social discourse. I examine the extent to which they use narration of tragedies and oppression of the past to define their identities that create the capacity for their voices to be agents instead of fixed subject matters. In this context lived experiences and narratives are closely related. I will also show

within this community how narratives based on lived experiences becomes the single mode of articulation of self, as identity is formed when we have a notion of how we have become and, where we are going (Taylor, 1989), where we understand our present action in the form of ‘and then’ because “narrative is an ontological condition of social life”(Somers, 1994, p. 614). These narratives reveal how victimhood manifests itself within the everyday life, the manner they deal with it and how they perceive it.

2.7 Defining Shi’i Identity- Interviews

My first interview was with Ahmed. A young graduate student who has lived almost all of his life in Canada. He had moved here with his family as a very young child from Pakistan. Ahmed considers himself “a very active member of this community”. He is a proud Canadian Shi’i Muslim, as he calls himself. He takes a special pride in his Shi’i-ness and his Canadian-ness, as he calls it. He spoke of his Shi’i Canadian identity and its relation to sense of victimhood:

[...]direct threat to life is not the only reason why we feel like victims. We are prejudiced against all the time...when you are a minority within a minority it is always much more difficult to get a representation. Intersectionality? Is that what it’s called?

Ahmed used the term intersectionality as he began to tell me about what being a Shi’i Muslim in Canada meant to him, trying to weave together his lived experiences in form of stories to reflect that. When Ahmed began to tell me about his lived experiences in Canada, he began with his understanding of Shi’i identity which in his words was:“...being the under-dog in life” but at the same time he defined a part of that as: “...struggling against a larger force that may not be part of a just force” a perception that was quickly attached thematically, in his words to “the ordeals of Karbala”. A connection between the past and the present was overwhelmingly

present in his story about his life. He insisted that: “victimhood is definitely part of my identity- I’ve been taught to talk my mind- we are always in constant struggle against the establishment- we are always the victims.”

Ahmed perceived victimhood as a fear of not being able to belong, not being able to voice his concerns and his lived experiences and the discriminations he has faced from the larger Muslim community. The demands for intra-group equality, in particular in light of Canadian multicultural policies that attempts to be attentive to promote inter-group equality (Mahajan, 2005) was evident in Ahmed’s account. The re-examining of the multicultural framework of accommodation in particular, the intra-group equality, will be explored further in the next chapter.

As a minority within a minority, this community of Shi’i Muslims in BC find themselves in a position where they are discriminated against by a majority that is in itself a minority, faced with both Islamophobia, from Canadian society and prejudice against Shi’i Muslims from within the Muslim community corresponds to what Avigail Eisenberg speaks to in her edited book, *Minorities within Minorities*. She asks a crucial question, “what happens to individuals or minorities within protected minorities who find that their community discriminate against them?” (Eisenberg & Spinner-Halev, 2005, p. 1). The stories shared by the participants place a special emphasis on collective community work that reinforces and maintains a cohesive shared identity which I argue is the response to that question.

In the stories Ahmed shared in relation to how he understood victimhood, his inability to participate fully as a member of the Muslim community, because he was ‘unwanted’, was his main concern, followed by his insistence on changing that position. This stemmed from his belief that “our community is much more political than other communities” referencing the

transnational sectarian divide here in Canada as well. Ahmed referenced an annual event they undertake as a community which is a procession called “Walk With Hussein” where on the 10th day of Muharam²⁹ of every year, the community organizes a procession around downtown Vancouver, as a symbolic representation to posit themselves and their voice among other voices (Das, 2007) in Canada.

Victimhood for Ahmed was not a fixed position imbedded in powerlessness but a position to be used as a stepping stone to move or to act. Ahmed perceives the victimization of Shi’i Muslims in his home country, the abduction and murder of his uncle because “he was a Shi’i Muslim” a big contributing factor to how his parents have and continue to live in fear, even when the direct threat is lifted. For Ahmed, victimhood, has taken a new shape here, in Canada, it is one that is synonymous with underrepresentation and discrimination. He shared with me a story about his mom’s fierce opposition to a school assignment when he was a kid where he was asked, as part of a social studies assignment, to draw a family tree. He never completed that assignment because his mother feared that disclosure of identity, as this used to be a dangerous back when they were in Pakistan. He stated that “there is always an overarching fear that my parents have had...so we had that feeling of Shi’i being persecuted very often and we have not gotten over that to get involved again...” referring to active participation in various community events, although as he is now an older adult he has taken a more active role within the community.

Although his parents’ sense of fear was more apparent, his new-found outlook on life was very different: “I’ve been taught to talk my mind- we are always in constant struggle

²⁹ Muharram (Arabic: مُحَرَّم) is the first month of the Islamic calendar. The tenth day of Muharram is known as the Day of Ashura, where Shi’i Muslims mourn the death of Hussain and his family, honoring the martyrs by prayer and abstinence from joyous events.

against the establishment”. He now has become more vocal about political issues as he sees that as a responsibility he has as a Shi’i Muslim. In relation to this statement, Ahmed told me about his experience meeting a Member of Parliament who he questioned about the Saudi-Arms deal. Where he was told “if Canada doesn’t do it, someone else will, so why not Canada?” For Ahmed, it was an “inhumane” act if Canada went through with the Saudi-Arms deal. Ahmed indicated how the Shi’i minorities in Saudi Arabia were under threat and this deal could be directly affecting them. He made sure his voice was heard when it comes to his stance about foreign affairs issues, a striking difference of how his parents would have wanted him to avoid his activism in anyway.

The stories shared by Ahmed heavily focused on his lived experiences. His lived experiences, not only influence his current positioning but influence and guide his actions particularly his notions of his current situated-ness, the sense of continuity of his identity in the migratory context, between ‘here’ and ‘there’ and his interactions with others from other communities (Dewey, 1986). Moreover, Brown’s notion of shifting from personal “I” to “us” for injured parties is also present. In the stories of the participants of this study the notion of shifting positionality from “I” to “us” involved an additional layer of “we”; their willingness and interest in working with other marginalized communities in BC was especially vibrant in their stories. They spoke of various initiatives that they had organized with various organizations and charity organization in Richmond and Downtown East-Side, I will explore this in the next two chapter in more details. Thus, in Ahmed’s story the need for being more present and active was not self-referential to him as an individual. It was always the “we” when he spoke of the community centre and their efforts to work alongside other communities. In treating victimhood as an analytical concept to conceptualize the process of marginalization

something more than individual pain is expressed by Ahmed and, as I shall show, others - something collective, social, with moral and political implications (Rosland, 2009).

One of the first people that I got to know from this community was Malika, a very active member of the community, she is passion driven and hardworking. Her busy work schedule of her current full-time role in a well-respected firm in Vancouver has never stopped her from working the long extra hours to help her community members and those in need. Malika shared with me the ‘pain and embarrassment’ she feels when Shi’i Muslims are not included in the public discourse; she spoke of the shame she felt when she was once involved with a non-for profit organizations and had to tell them that her community’s efforts in helping others was not welcomed by other Muslim organizations in Vancouver. She spoke of the embarrassment that is associated with being marginalized and deprived of social cooperation. Since injustices of marginality is associated with “form(s) of uselessness[...]and lack of self-respect” (Young, 1988, p. 282). To Malika, being denied an opportunity to cooperate because of the rampant anti-Shi’i sentiments from the larger Muslim community creates a sense of powerlessness where there is not much that can be done in the face of such incidents with no place to take their frustration to find a resolution. To that end she said to me: “I mean it’s sad – I feel like a kid in the school playground – you know when you need someone to come fight for you? Right? when you can’t sort it out between yourselves – it’s embarrassing - really.” This lack of acknowledgement and non-inclusivity became an overarching theme in every story, where the insistence on inclusion as a right often become a principle to fight for.

Victimhood by nature is a claim for justice, a declaration that a group or individual has suffered wrongs and must be compensated (Horwitz, 2018). In the case of this

community however, not compensation per se, but a right to be represented and acknowledged to be able to participate freely without sense of marginalization is what is sought. With these narratives we learn that victimhood is about simply claiming one's rights (Fassin & Rechtman, 2009). Lack of representation both locally and nationally as a minority within a minority was prominent theme in their narratives.

Maryam, an academic in higher education shared her view of inclusion as such: "By being acknowledged it gives you validity- by being acknowledged you become valid and that is important". It is this sense of validity that focused her on a quest for recognition. The concept of *Zulm* was ever present in Maryam's narrative and others because *Zulm* was in a position that they sought to oppose. Their lived experiences of victimhood and marginalization and their understanding illustrate that victimhood and suffering were not a defining moment of identity and self-understanding which led to anger but a phenomenon that produced a need to become an assertive agent of change within their communities. In Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, those who suffer or those who are victims are active only in their sense of hatred and resentment of their oppressors which is the mark of their moral goodness (Nietzsche & Kaufmann, 2000), but what can be said regarding the narratives shared by the participants in this study is that victimhood was the source of their desire to act. The Karbala narrative plays a role here within their understanding of moral goodness - standing up to injustice is the mark of their moral goodness.

As Leila, a young professional, shared with me, struggle and hardship are a model examples of the life that Hussein had in his life, and as a model behaviour that she wants her everyday life to reflect, "When I have a problem I look at the struggle that the Imam [Hussein] had I think about [his] struggle and I think about my own struggles and feel like if God loves

them so much and they struggled so it's ok if I am going through it". The acknowledgement of struggle in Leila's story is not one that celebrates victimhood, but in the context of her story, she emphasized how she has to go the extra mile at times to be able to be fully recognized and accepted by others in society.

She shared with me that she feels Shi'i Muslims in Canada have to always do 'extra work' compared to other Muslim communities in order to resist their expulsion from the general public discourse, as an additional Muslim narrative (Stone-Mediatore, 2003). Maryam spoke of acknowledgement as a form of recognition, an issue that this community still struggles with which is the lack of meaningful public reception which ultimately not only prevents an action from being recognized as part of history but in doing so it prevents the action's impact in the present. As Arendt argues when an action is not fully and meaningfully interpreted by the surrounding community, it lacks the completion...accomplished by remembrance (Arendt, 1951), that is, it is never crystallized in narrative form and it escapes what people recognize and respond to. An action has full historical force only "when an audience narrates and remembers it, for only such a reception makes opinions significant and action effective" (Arendt, 1951, p. 296). Those whose actions are misunderstood by the dominant culture or are judged by their classification rather than their individual deeds "are deprived not of the right to freedom, but of the right to action; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of their right to opinion"(Arendt, 1951, p. 296).

It is almost impossible to define this persistence to co-exist in light of the marginalization they face without the mention of the historical events in their narratives. In their narratives, they articulate what it means to rethink 'historical narratives' by initiating new ways of constructing everyday lives where they interpret historical events relevant to their

particular social stand point, where their efforts to build a promising future that is community-rooted and passion driven. Regardless of the marginalization they constantly face and without reinforcing victimhood as a fixed position. When Maryam shared her love for storytelling and the importance of historical narratives she said: “The storytelling, the narrative- it keeps it all alive- it is not negative- it could be very positive- for instance Zainab and how she became stronger from it- in spite of it, if she can do it so can we!”. An interesting finding within the stories of the participants was the historical examples they referenced. The female participants referenced Zainab, Hussein’s sister, and her struggle and her bravery as a storyteller as a source of their motivation.

Considering the historical narrative and the victimization that is associated with the events at Karbala, it is remarkable to see how that narrative has shifted from a story of suffering and pain to that of empowerment and resistance and particularly for the female participants, Zainab is seen as a source of empowerment and strength rather than a helpless victim, a strong character that one could look up to as a source of inspiration.

To Amin, a scholar in the community, his Shi’i identity was defined as a “sense of belonging and sense of association- belonging to community and association to their history and values- a sense of attachment to our history- being attached to the tragedy of Karbala”. Amin articulated the Shi’i identity in terms of “a moral stance” and that the heart and soul of Shi’ism is “the moral values that we have and that must define us, our moral values, justice and freedom”. Amin believed that Karbala must be viewed with a lens of theology and the lens of politics as the Shi’i political identity is more apparent than ever before.

In defining his position and lived experiences, Amin, focused on the Shi’i identity as a collective, as a need to act, as a need to be ever-present and active. This notion of moving

beyond the “I am the victim” to “I want this for us” is ever more present in the narratives shared in this study. Amin argues that:

Karbala [has changed] from a story of victimhood to a story of resistance. Karbala now has become associated with story of resistance- where the narrative around this story of Karbala is full of verbiage of resistance against oppression, freedom and justice. Those are the ideas that are now associated with Karbala- we can now see people in places like Iraq and Lebanon people are taking aspiration from Karbala- That we can actually fulfill our part in our communities- traditional school of thought see Karbala as a tragedy and act of oppression and mourn that tragedy, but we have another segment, that we will mourn but we will raise from it (haiyhat min al dhilla) is something that is reverberating in the Shi'i Muslim world today. So our understanding of Karbala is changing as we move to the 21st Century.

What we can observe in this particular narrative is that there is a significant focus on changing the narrative of victimhood from a traditional definition which tends to focus on the injury and its static category of suffering and pain and inability to act to treating victimhood as analytical concept where suffering becomes something more than individual pain; where it becomes something collective (Rosland, 2009). Amin articulated that:

Our perception of Karbala is also changing where we think of ourselves as minorities and victims- generally the [traditional] scholars say we are not going to rise and we are going to focus on piety and not on the social and political ideology- but that was in the 60's and the 70's -if we want to see justice we have to see it in our communities, we have to start by effecting those in our circle of care- starting with family, community, society then nation.

His emphasis on calling for active Shi'i political participation and engagement as a scholar in the community was a prominent theme in what he shared with me. This insistence on participation and political engagement as a form of agency, the capacity to act or the intention to act and do something (Gray & Wegner, 2009) is ever present and persistent in these narratives.

Amin also spoke of marginalization and discrimination that he faces as a member of a minority within a minority and referred to it as friction but at the same time: “[...] it is an opportunity for growth through difference”. Amin spoke of the alienation and marginalization that he feels as a minority within a minority, where he believes: “it’s one thing to say we’ve got rights but just because of that it doesn’t mean we have [those rights]; it doesn’t mean that we are going to be able to exercise it.” Another theme that emerges is the solidarity with other marginalized communities. On the issue of rights, for example, Amin states: “the black community had to struggle for it and continue to do so, women had to fight for it and arguably they are still doing for their rights, indigenous people had to do it and continue to do it and we have to struggle, and we have got to fight it”.

Here once again, we are reminded of the importance of collective memory and the fixation on “we” even when the stories that were shared were personal narratives based on each individual’s lived experience, the importance of the collective Shi'i identity and participation remained of utter importance. Whether it is the historical narrative of Karbala or the historical narrative of victimhood that has affected the participants individually. What is evident is that there is a relationship between the individual and collective suffering, between memory and collective identity, even memories of distant or ancient past. Social memory is defined by Maurice Halbwachs, a French sociologist, as “a matter of how minds work together

in society, structured by social arrangements”(Halbwachs, 1992, p. 38). In this context, it is safe to say that collective memory employs historical events to provide political justification for identities that struggle for their rights in the present, especially for identities that are grounded in grievance and victimhood, as is the case with Shi’ism (Jacoby, 2015). It is these memories and historical events that link people across time and space, which allows individuals to develop strong emotions about the historical events that have the potential to contribute to the struggle for recognition. In Amin’s words, the struggle is to have:

[...]our rights to be respected and to be given the same treatment and as other communities are given – that our scholars are not be put under greater scrutiny – our wordings are not put under greater scrutiny for peoples political agendas than other communities– it came to a point where they were saying that we should prepare your school’s curriculum for you; completely striping us of even that independence- the autonomy to form our own- to be heard at the table[...]

Amin, in this context spoke of the marginalization and the increased surveillance of Muslims and specifically Shi’i Muslims, here in Canada, particularly as the result of the unrest the sectarian tension in the Middle-East which has also made itself present in Canada. Amin spoke of the scrutiny that Muslim schools, Muslim scholars and Shi’i Muslim scholars have faced in recent years.

In this chapter I shed light on the lived experiences of the participants of this study as they offered a unique description of what victimhood means to them. I wanted to allow for their narratives to occupy a space in scholarship on minority rights, as they spoke of victimhood, based on their own personal expressions, as victimhood is articulated in personal expressions (Meyers, 2016) in a range of interactions and processes (Mythen, 2007) that they

encounter in their everyday. In their narratives and description of victimhood they engaged with the story of Hussein in Karbala which has created a sense of agency where passive notions of victimhood are substituted by active ones. In their articulation of their understanding of victimhood we can observe, based on their lived experiences how they exercise control over it (Green & Pemberton, 2018) through their community work. The individual experiences of suffering and marginalization each brings a unique voice as they actively give meaning to victimhood through various practices. In their stories we can observe that there is a significant focus on shifting victimhood from its traditional conceptualization of static category of suffering and pain and inability to act to an analytical concept where suffering becomes something more than individual pain; but that of a collective (Rosland, 2009) which inspires action and resistance in the face of marginalization.

Defining the complexities of victimhood does not end in this chapter, but it continues to make itself apparent in the next chapters just as vividly, weaving itself into politics of recognition and Canada's multiculturalism and its formation into a collective resistance movement. This chapter sought to introduce how victimhood is perceived and in what ways it manifests itself in the stories of some of the member of this community and in their everyday lives, the narratives collected for this study will inform and guide the next chapter as I explore the concept of victimhood in relation to politics of (mis)recognition.

Chapter 3: Politics of (mis)Recognition

Narratives on the refusal of re-victimization through civic engagement

“[...]We are an immigrant community- we are very precautious when we come to these lands- what we feel sometimes is an inferiority complex, we don't see ourselves as equal citizens -we see ourselves as second class citizens, we don't believe in the rights that is given to us. There is a lot of fear and people are still afraid to talk about controversial issues because of [what] the state apparatus may do to them[...]"(Amin, Participant)

“[...]every individual should have an equal opportunity with other individuals to make the life that the individual is able and wishes to have[...]"(preamble to the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1985)

In the previous chapter, victimhood as defined by the participants of this study, was explored. Their stories focused on the sense of marginalization that they have experienced as a minority within a minority in Canada. Experiences of marginalization, a form of oppression, as Young describes it, occupied a significant portion of their stories which they spoke of in the context of their everyday lived experiences. Often times questioning, as Malika did, in her story “why do we have to fight be in included”; reminding the reader that often, within the untold stories of marginalized groups there exists a pain of misrecognition, a form of oppression as Charles Taylor refers to it. The sense of inclusion that Malika was seeking, implies equal recognition and equal rights where the dignity of every person is secure and respected. The sense of marginalization and misrecognition was a recurring theme in the stories of these participants and for this very reason we need to hear their stories, so we can learn, as a society, who these individuals are so we can grasp the ‘moral significance of what they have to tell us’ (Meyers, 2016). The participants of this study spoke of their marginalization in light of misrecognition. Our identity, as Taylor argues, is “shaped by recognition” and that “non-recognition or misrecognition can inflict harm” (Taylor, 1994,

p.25) on the person on the receiving end as the participants of this study tell us in their stories.

In this chapter I aim to explore the politics of (mis)recognition as defined by Charles Taylor (1994) and discussed in chapter one, its structure within Canadian multiculturalism as it relates to the way it is understood by this particular community. I will then explore, through the interviews conducted, how as Shi'i Canadians, the participants of this study, have internally acknowledged and recognized their misrecognition within Canadian multiculturalism based on their lived experiences. I will then explain the means they have taken to change that through community work to change the perception and raise above the imposed misrecognition as they have understood the struggle for recognition as an onus on themselves. In this chapter I aim to illustrate, using the participants' lived experience as they narrate their own stories, how the politics of misrecognition has created a condition where this particular group believes the solution to the cultural and social exclusions from the larger Muslim community is by reasserting their identities in public spaces through their community work.

Their refusal of misrecognition, which is imposed on them within the larger community, has also led them to internalize the idea that the onus is on them to change the ongoing invisibility both as Shi'i Muslims within the larger Muslim community and Shi'i Muslims within the Canadian multicultural society. Therefore, their response to that is through community work and participation as a community and in joining other marginalized groups, as they share a sense of longing to equitable representation and self-rule as they collectively struggle for recognition (Abu-Laban & Nieguth, 2000; Tully, 2012). What we can deduce here is that the real, understudied challenge that remain within the multicultural

framework is the case of the internal minorities who continue to seek equal treatment from within their communities (Eisenberg & Spinner-Halev, 2005).

In the analysis of the narratives shared by the participants, being active members within their community and within the general public stems from two principles. One is based on the idea of fairness, that is as equal members, as Canadians, equitable participation is viewed as a right and that re-victimization is to be prevented in this ‘new home’³⁰. The second principle was based on the faith-based responsibility to act, one that is motivated by a religious conviction, particularly as it’s related to the Shi’i doctrine, ‘a religion of protest’ which is founded on speaking truth to power (Dabashi, 2005) with a single aim to make a stand against inequity and oppression (Al-Muzaffar, 1982). This chapter aims to focus on, based on the narratives of the participants in this study, that misrecognition which is the result of lack of equitable participation in this context is the result of the Canadian state failing to recognize internal diversity of Muslim communities as well as the internal Canadian Muslim politics that has in no shape or form been studied or explored in current diasporic literature in Canada.

3.1 Fragmented Self: ‘Here’ and ‘There’

In exploring how the participants defined their Shi’i identity, their definitions always involved their positionality here in Canada; always defined in the context of ‘here’ and ‘there’, inviting us to ask how has it evolved overtime and particularly within the migratory context. The sense of victimhood and marginalization that they had experienced was also

³⁰ As shall be discussed, the intersection of gender, national origin, religious identity can play a role in different senses of being ‘equal’ or not in Canada relative to others within the Muslim community as well as those outside of it, but the key point here is that virtually all of the participants in my study expressed a belief in the principle of equality and respect of difference through multiculturalism, this will be illustrated through their stories in this and the next chapter more specifically.

included in their narratives within the context of ‘here’ and ‘there’ each with its own specific challenges.

For many of them, Canada had become the ‘home’ that made them feel safe, safe to an extent of ‘no direct threat to life’ as one participant puts it- a place where they could belong, but at the same time a place where they had to ‘prove themselves’ as another participant puts it, in order to be recognized as a community among other communities as well as a minority community within a larger Muslim community. Their stories revealed their love and appreciation for how they perceived multiculturalism in Canada. The way it had made them more ‘tolerant’ and had allowed their children to be “much open and accepting than they once were” when they were younger back in their own countries of origin. Multiculturalism, as a concept, simply appealed to them and this was evident in virtually all of the participants’ stories in this study. Multiculturalism is perceived in their stories as a Canadian characteristic, one that was aligned with diversity. It was the unique feature about Canada, that was different from ‘back home’ as it was mainly in response to how it had made them feel ‘safer’. As a researcher, I recognize that multiculturalism has been deeply criticized particularly by some indigenous and critical theory scholars as well as individuals who have faced discrimination and racism in Canada, but in this case, within the stories of the participants in this study, there is a certain appeal to multiculturalism that I aim to specifically focus on instead, which can, in its own way contribute to our understanding of how minorities within minorities perceive multiculturalism and why. It is worth noting that some indigenous scholars (Coulthard, 2014) and critical scholars in political theory (Dhamoon, 2009) argue liberal multiculturalism as practise in Canada can be a tool of assimilation and colonialism, however, this is not a view that was expressed by the

participants of this study. Although critical of liberal multiculturalism, Dhamoon also states that “in the face of the backlash against immigrants (whether legal or illegal) and in the current heightened climate of Islamophobia and securitization, some versions of multiculturalism provide a recourse to diversity that may be otherwise difficult to negotiate and express. Liberal multiculturalism has, in this sense, mainstreamed issues of diversity and culture” (Dhamoon, 2009, p.5). She also highlights the fact that to some extent multiculturalism has created a space for marginalized communities to address the difficulties they face (Dhamoon, 2009; Srivastava, 2007). It is perhaps this space that the participants of this study have found appealing about multiculturalism which I aim to explore further in this chapter.

Their stories revealed lived experiences of marginalization, misrecognition, fear and rejection which they attributed to being a minority as Muslims in Canada and Shi’is with the larger Muslim community. They shared with me that in order to overcome misrecognition, extensive community work, along with other marginalized communities, to change the reality of their condition was always needed. Claiming that the sense of injustice they faced was one that stems from the lack of equal participation in decision-making bodies within the larger Muslim community; a faith- based stigmatization that they continue to struggle against in their everyday lives.

To this community, recognizing this sense of injustice requires action, a principle they live by, one that was taken from Hussein in Karbala and the only way to live the message of Karbala is through direct participation in order to make a presence for themselves – politics as activity as discussed in chapter one with respect to Hannah Arendt and Das. But active participation as a form of politics, is here informed by religious conviction. A *political*

*spirituality*³¹ as coined by Michael Foucault as he wrote about the 1979 revolution in Iran. A concept that is the most fitting in the context of this particular community and this particular research; I will discuss this concept in more depth in the next chapter.

As discussed in the previous chapter, within Shi'ism any form of injustice requires action and since misrecognition is a form of injustice³² and oppression (Young, 1988), resisting it through community work, inevitably, becomes a religious duty. In examining the role of minorities within minorities, Avigail Eisenberg poses the question “what happens to individuals or minorities within protected minorities who find that their community discriminate against them?”(Eisenberg & Spinner-Halev, 2005, p. 1). The edited collection by Eisenberg and Spinner-Halev was in response to the debate initiated by Susan Moller Okin in her book *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* They sought to address the intersection of gender and ethno-religious identity but also related questions of minorities which exist within minorities in a more nuanced way than Okin's original book which denounced multiculturalism as anti-feminist.

In an attempt to find an answer to that question, perhaps we should also ask, where do minorities within minorities go within a multicultural state like Canada when faced with marginalization from within their own communities and how do they navigate these complex issues and questions? Who do they turn to? Where do they take their grievances?

³¹ “political spiritualité” was used by Foucault in his analysis of the revolution in Iran in 1979 as he wrote about the connection between religion and politics and the self in relation to Shi'i Islam and its effect on the Iranian revolution. Quoted in the *Nouvel Observateur*, no.1283, June 8-14, 1998; as well as Michel Foucault, “Questions of Method,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 73–86.

³² There are of course other forms of injustice including the injustices visited about indigenous peoples due to settler colonization including immigration. As I shall discuss, one of the interesting findings in my interviews was the degree to which participants recognized this injustice particularly in relation to the arguments advanced by Idle No More.

The stories shared here reveal some of the answers. For this particular minority diaspora, they have used this sense of marginalization that they have faced as a stepping stone to gain recognition, challenging their underrepresentation. They have made it their mission to challenge this negative sentiment of marginalization and misrecognition from the larger Muslim community through their own community work founded on the ideals of their *political spirituality*, action that is informed by religious conviction, a faith-based political movement that seeks to challenge underrepresentation and make claims to full recognition by calling attention to and promoting their community specificity and differentiation (Fraser, 2008). Their refusal of misrecognition is a refusal of (re)victimization as that has become part of their past, in their home countries where they were targeted for being Shi'i Muslims, a minority that was severely marginalized and oppressed. Their efforts as manifested in their active roles within their community in the face of marginalization and misrecognition both in the presence of anti-Shi'i sentiments from the larger Muslim community as well as Islamophobia in the broader picture is yet another challenge that they need to combat. Their insistence on the refusal of misrecognition and the ways they do so will guide this chapter, a theme that was so dominant in their narratives of their past and directly linked to their sense of identity and victimhood. It is precisely this connection that I am exploring here based on their lived experiences as they opened up about the misrecognition that was once part of their past and how it had made itself present here in Canada and their mission to fight it, this time as a community.

As the stories in the previous chapter highlighted, fear made itself visible in some of the stories that were shared by them. Fear was not only articulated as a physical danger, but the fear of not being included or accepted was a dominant theme in their narratives. Fear of

not being accepted, fear of not being included, fear of stigmatization, fear of Islamophobia, forced exclusion from the larger Muslim community and fear of victimhood. Those fears when combined, lead to *zulm*, a condition that needs to be fought against in the Shi'i consciousness.

Politics of recognition in this particular study is twofold: first it is the acknowledgment of misrecognition as told by their lived experiences and second is the struggle for recognition which has become a part of their collective identity as the Shi'i Muslim Canadian community.

3.2 The Articulation of Multicultural Identity by Shi'i-Muslim-Canadians

“A policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework ... (is) most suitable means of assuring the cultural freedom of Canadians. Such a policy should help break down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies. National unity if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must be founded on confidence in one's own individual identity; out of this can grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes and assumptions. A vigorous policy of multiculturalism ... can form the base of a society which is based on fair play for all. The government will support and encourage the various cultures and ethnic groups that give structure and vitality to our society. They will be encouraged to share their cultural expression and values with other Canadians and so contribute to a richer life for us all.” (Government of Canada, 1971)

“...[as Shi'i Muslims in Canada, we want] ...our rights to be respected and to be given the same treatment and respect as other communities are given – that our scholars are not be put under greater scrutiny – our wordings are not put under greater scrutiny for peoples political agendas than other communities- our curriculum comes under attack – it came to a point where they were saying that we should prepare your curriculum for you completely striping us of even that independence- the autonomy to form our own- to be heard at the table...”(Amin, Participant)

Canadian multicultural policy, as stated above, highlights at its core, the importance of breaking down barriers and stigmatization that limits the ability of individuals to freely

express and explore their identities. Multicultural policy promises a society which is *'based on fair play for all'* which eventually contributes to *'a richer life for us all'*. In Will Kymlicka's *'Three Lives of Multiculturalism'* which documents the history of multicultural policy in Canada, he argues that as multiculturalism policy is continuously evolving it is essential to also add religion alongside race and ethnicity as the third stage of multiculturalism (Kymlicka, 2015). He argues that multiculturalism as a policy aims to reduce barriers and stigmas that limit the ability of individuals to freely express and explore their ethnic and religious identities (Kymlicka, 2015). Multiculturalism insists that individuals should be free to express their ethnic and religious identity and not be subject to stigmatization, discrimination, prejudice or face marginalization for doing so. Kymlicka invites us to address this issue by giving voice to faith-based communities so they can share their stories that will guide us to understand multiculturalism as it evolves further. It is naïve to assume that all Canadians have a clear understanding of what multiculturalism really means and its distinction in principle from practice. The principle here is the multicultural policies and programs but the key to its success is the implementation of such policies and programs.

It is important to acknowledge that communities are internally diverse and not homogeneous and it is indeed this exact layer that has not sufficiently been acknowledged with the multiculturalism policies in Canada³³. It is also important to acknowledge the struggles such communities face within the larger community and as scholars we have the

³³ There is literature that critiques Canadian multiculturalism policy, Will Kymlicka's liberal multiculturalism and even Charles Taylor's recognition based multiculturalism theories on the grounds that they tend to homogenize Canadian society into an 'us' and 'them' with both being relatively homogenous in character. As Anne Phillips writes, 'multiculturalism exaggerates the internal unity of cultures, solidifies differences that are currently fluid and makes people from other cultures seem more exotic and distinct than they really are'. (Phillips, *Multiculturalism without culture*, 2009, p. 14; see also Arneil et al. 2004 – *Sexual Justice/Cultural Justice*, Routledge)

responsibility to ask whether within the larger multiculturalism framework, diversity and equality can coexist in such communities and if so, how?

Marginalization that minorities within minorities face can in fact impede the idea of *'equal opportunity'* that multiculturalism promises. As the everyday stories of this particular minority with a minority community clearly suggests, equal opportunity is not a guaranteed promise but a status that they need to go the extra mile for through constant activism and resistance in order to achieve. The Shi'i community, as we learn throughout this study, use historical and religious narratives as the source of their inspiration to resist and transform their marginal statuses, but the question that remains that needs further examination is other minority with minority communities who face similar dilemmas in their everyday lives. Hence, it is crucial to shed some light on this issue since ensuring minority cultures flourish and survive is one of the primary concerns of multiculturalism (Mahajan, 2005).

In re-examining the history of Canadian multiculturalism policy and in particular its current third stage, Kymlicka poses a necessary inquiry into a much-needed conversation which begins to explore the issue of religious groups or faith-based claims as it relates to multiculturalism policy in Canada. His timely and crucial proposal suggests that in order to fully grasp and accommodate the needs of minorities, particularly religious minorities, so they can lead the kinds of lives they choose, a thorough case-by-case examination is needed. He proposes that this must be done through a "mechanisms of consultation, participation and deliberation that enable the expression of the full range of voices within religious communities"(Kymlicka, 2015, p. 31). This speaks directly to Eisenberg's research on the question of minorities within minorities often overlooked within earlier forms of multicultural theory and practice as well as Taylor's theory of misrecognition understood

through a more inter-subjective form of multicultural theory and Fraser's equity of participation frame for recognition. The stories that participants of this study have shared are a critically important single step towards this much needed inquiry and consultation with minorities within minority groups in Canada as they share glimpses of their lived experiences as it relates to their perception of Canadian multiculturalism.

In the participants' stories, Canada's multiculturalism allows for this sort of community effort as a form of politics of recognition. Where they can 'go the extra mile' to prove that they can co-exist and make their presence known among other communities, both within the larger Canadian community as well as the Muslim Canadian community, they are more than willing to do so.

In exploring the various definitions that multiculturalism has been given over the past four decades in Canada, a comprehensive definition takes into account the need for the presence of two equally important categories, one which focuses on the presence of cultural diversity in a society and the other one is the presence of equitable participation by all, regardless of ethnicity (Berry et al., 2016)³⁴. However, the perceived fact is that multiculturalism is mostly thought of as the presence of cultural diversity, this was also the case with the participants of this study, where their understanding of multiculturalism was embedded in the idea of existence of cultural diversity and acceptance, whereas equitable participation was not seen as a second core element of multiculturalism but a symptom of intolerance and misrecognition that they had to work on in order to combat.

The question of what multiculturalism really means is not only misunderstood for the diaspora communities (Fries & Gingrich, 2010). Most Canadians have no clear idea on how

³⁴ This definition by Berry, Kalin and Taylor appeared first in: Berry, J. W., Kalin, R., & Taylor, D. (1977). *Multiculturalism and ethnic attitudes in Canada*. Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services.

this complex field of multiculturalism operates or what it means in the context of everyday life. The usual assumption tends to be that the federal government has an official multiculturalism policy without an accurate awareness of its functionality (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010). In this case, a question that is worthwhile to explore is what happens when only promotion of diversity is advanced without the principle of equitable inclusion. As Berry notes, the presence and promotion of cultural diversity in Canada without equitable inclusion is simply discrimination (J. Berry, 2016). This form of discrimination he argues takes place at three levels: systemic level which is society as a whole; amongst the in-group by excluding groups of people because of their membership in a particular kind of culture/beliefs and the personal level in which an individual's opportunity to participate as a member of cultural community is diminished (J. Berry, 2016). What Berry presents in his analysis is especially relevant to the Shi'i Muslim community, in terms of how they perceive misrecognition and the reality of their everyday life in Canada based on their lived experiences.

It is important to note here that this is not merely another critique of multiculturalism as there is a plethora of such studies done in recent years particularly as it relates to issues of immigration and an increase in anti-immigration sentiments across North America and Europe in the recent years (Kymlicka, 2012). My analysis of multiculturalism as it relates to the Shi'i community diaspora aims to shed light on the question in intra-group³⁵ equality that has been mostly absent in literature (Eisenberg & Spinner-Halev, 2005; Mahajan, 2005).

³⁵ As articulated in the feminist multiculturalist scholarship (Fraser, 2008) and the minority within minority scholarship, intra-group equality is the principle that refers to the idea that all members of a particular group or community, be that Canadians or Muslims, have equal rights to participate in the community, have equal voices and are recognized as equals by others. This is central to liberal multiculturalism and also feminist multiculturalism (Arneil et al, 2004)

The participants' stories, illustrate their immense appreciation for a society that is culturally diverse, where they're given a chance to practice their faith within their communities safely but these stories also show the absence of equal participation and equity and thus impose challenges to their sense of self (Taylor, 1994) in addition, this sense of inequity in participation contributes to their sense of misrecognition that also impact their sense of self (Fraser, 2008).

This Shi'i diaspora community, specifically as they have experienced direct threats in their home countries as the result of marginalization imposed by various states, perceive civic engagement in Canada as potentially the only powerful way to fulfill their political aspiration (Liyakat Takim, 2018) as well as their spiritual responsibility of speaking truth to power (Dabashi, 2011; Saffari, 2017) which could potentially lead them to enjoy the kinds of rights and protections they deserve as equal citizens. It is however clear from this analysis that the existence of many cultures does not automatically make a society multicultural, neither does the existence of policies that advocate for diversity and equal participation. Both are necessary but not sufficient conditions to fulfill the multicultural promise of Canada; what is needed and essential is to have policies in place that could actually be implemented which would both recognize the specific nature of the existence of diversity within minority groups (the so called minorities within minority issue) and the equal participation of all parts of a given minority so that Shi'i Muslim Canadians would be both recognized and enjoy the same rights as all other Canadian citizens (Kymlicka, 2015).

3.3 Stories of *being* "Shi'i-Muslim-Canadians"

Participants in this study, spoke of their Canadian-ness in the context of 'identity', 'home', 'belonging', a place where they felt physically safe compared to their home

countries. Canadian-ness was also situated in their sense of responsibility, a *duty*, as some of them called it. A duty as Shi'i Muslims, a duty as Shi'i Canadian citizens. They spoke of their appreciation of the multicultural nature of Canada and the impact it has had on their sense of acceptance. The stories of their Canadian-ness were told in relation to Canadian multiculturalism, although no one specifically defined what multiculturalism meant to them, they each understood multiculturalism in relation to what they viewed Canada to be based on their own lived experiences. Multiculturalism was explained in various forms for one it meant "tolerance"; for another it was within the context of "I have become more accepting", for another it was the way she saw her son's relationship with his friends who were from various ethnicities that "played music and sat together" with total disregard to the difference in their race, nationality, ethnicity and colour. To them, multiculturalism was what Canada represented at its very core, a fundamental basis of Canadian-ness. However, they also spoke of their continuous struggle for recognition, both from the state as a minority group within a minority and their struggle against the misrecognition they felt from the larger Muslim community. While safeguarding their distinctiveness, they recognized that in light of Islamophobia and in lieu of a sense of community and the *Ummah*³⁶, the goal was not to cause disunity among the collective Muslim body in Canada, especially at a time where skepticism and islamophobia has impacted the lives of all Muslims in general. They denounce Islamophobia while at the same time denouncing Shi'i-phobia, a complex and multi-layered position that each participant tried to highlight in his or her own way.

This chapter aims to highlight their challenges as they continue to seek recognition for their distinctiveness, where they can, without marginalization, claim a recognition for

³⁶ An Arabic word used commonly to refer to the unity among the Muslim communities regardless of where they are located geographically.

their group-specific identity as equal citizens in social interactions. The stories below aim at highlighting the unique perspective this particular minority group has as they speak of their marginalization in the public sphere and their refusal to accept marginalization, by instead engaging in civic activities, informed by religious conviction and protected by the promise of multiculturalism because as Taylor notes, “withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression”(Taylor, 1994, p. 86).

The intercultural contact made itself present in every story they shared, one in particular touched upon many themes, a story of a hardworking, middle-aged woman, Mahin. Mahin spoke about her children and how they had become “her teachers” as she learned about diversity through them. Mahin told me about her experiences as a young woman back in her country of origin prior to moving to Canada more than 30 years ago were very different from what she is observing in her own children. She spoke about the lack of diversity that she grew up around in comparison to the diversity her children grew up with in Canada:

[...]I am very inspired by the youth- they are not intimidated by moving forward and being out there[...], she added,[...] my son is [politically active] and he is not afraid to write about [Shi’ism]– the young people are out there and they don’t feel victims [in this political climate] and he is not afraid to write about Shi’i people.

Signaling a shift in the perception of victimhood that exists with the new generation of Shi’i Muslims, a sentiment consistent with other stories collected. Mahin shared a beautiful story about a time when she visited her son who was a university student at the time in Ontario. One night, she asked her son to invite all of his friends as she was planning to make them

dinner as that would also give her a chance to meet them. She shared the interaction that she noticed that night as her son invited some of his close friends over for dinner:

A person from Lebanon , India, Sunni [Muslims], a Jewish young man, actually his roommate- another Indian friend- so many countries and a Greek as well...it was like a model UN in his apartment and they were all very nice people- even in terms of equality of gender and colours – I was floored about how they communicated with each other – as if there was no hiccups, reservations and the conversations were so amazing and it ended with [one of his friends] playing the guitar- he played and[they began to sing a song] one started signing in English and the guy from Lebanon began to add his words[in Arabic] and then another lady put her words in Urdu and I see that as assimilation and this is what God meant by ‘I made you from different colours and tribe so you may know one another’³⁷- that event made it clear to me – it didn’t matter to them who is who[that’s just how it is].

The distinction many of the participants made regarding their children or the younger generation’s attitude to diversity and inclusion was also very evident in many other narratives where there is more openness and accepting attitudes towards diversity. This sentiment being a product of robust multicultural policies has been widely studied. A survey conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2006 showed that the presence of multiculturalism policies play a significant role in creating a more inclusive and equitable public institutions which, in turn, had a positive impact on how students perceived diversity. It is worth noting that the study concluded that Canada was at an advantage

³⁷ “We have created you male and female and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another.” Quran (49:13)

compared to the other 29 countries in the study because of the presence of policies that specifically addressed cultural diversity (OECD, 2006)³⁸.

While Mahin's narrative included an appreciation of multiculturalism in Canada throughout my interview, there were also countless instances where she spoke of the Shi'i identity's marginalization even within that diversity. One was especially personal to her as she shared with me the difficulty her son had faced as he fell in love with a Sunni Muslim girl whose family strictly opposed that relationship unless he became a Sunni Muslim. To Mahin, this was not an issue of the younger generation but on ignorance as she called it. To Mahin, marginalization and discrimination here in Canada was something she had faced within the larger Muslim community. She recalled that her son met the girl he fell in love with during high school, as she put it "religion brought them together" as they were the only two students in their school that were practicing Muslims and used to fast during Ramadan, so practicing their faith brought them together and years later what almost brought their relationship to an end was also the same issue-religion. To Mahin, such "real stories" as she called them make her [...Shi'i identity]... more defined here[...in Canada...] – because "in order to hold on to your faith you live it a little more, you understand it a little more"- Her son's relationship continues on as they have, as families engaged in a "dialogue" to help sustain the relationship. In Mahin's story and the context that she shared this particular story with me, multiculturalism played a role even in such personal and intimate event. She spoke of acceptance of other cultures and possibility of dialogue as the positive attributes of multiculturalism. Perhaps one of the most intimate conversation I had with the participants of

³⁸ There is still some way to go in Canadian universities despite advances in both equity and diversity particularly at senior ranks amongst racialized faculty. The 2019 Report on Diversity and Inclusion at Canadian University reports advances have been made but more must be done. <https://www.univcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Equity-diversity-and-inclusion-at-Canadian-universities-report-on-the-2019-national-survey-Nov-2019.pdf>

this study was my interview with Mahin as she spoke very openly about her lived experiences. In her exploration of multiculturalism and the level of acceptance that it had provided her personally, she shared with me about her faith and how that has also changed significantly in Canada:

I am closer to the lord in Canada than I ever would have been in a Muslim country[...]I have grown to appreciate my culture- I've learned so far that religion is liberating, and culture is restricting- we have jumbled them all up- culture as community is a sense of community it serves, but being Muslim must be more than a culture it's a liberating if you understand it.

Mahin, was the only participant who opened up about how she perceived her faith as a Muslim woman in relation to her community. She spoke about her active role as a board member of a Muslim community centre a few years earlier and how she was among the first a few women in her community to be in such an important role adding another layer to her multi-layered identity. It is perhaps this particular reason why she decided to speak of the restriction that certain cultures impose on individuals, particularly in light of her experience as a Muslim woman. Mahin also acknowledged that faith-based marginalization and discrimination does exist within the larger Muslim community and that she has experienced that herself first hand. She later on told me that she believes “we [Shi'i Muslims] underrepresent ourselves”. As she believes that it is the responsibility of the Shi'i Muslims to reach out and “put themselves out there” to be representing this community more through actively seeking leadership position within the larger Muslim community, referencing her story about being a female board member because she made an effort to be in that role as she refused to underrepresent herself as a woman in that context; placing a special emphasis on

seeking recognition and its importance on identity formation. I observed a special kind of pride as Mahin shared this story with me, one that was derived from the joy of being recognized.

Recent studies that examine multiculturalism demonstrate that religious and ethnocultural minorities are demanding greater recognition and accommodation of their cultural practices and identities. The key question, however, is whether such recognition is contingent on the intra-group inequality within a larger minority group that they are part of? (Kymlicka, 2004; Mahajan, 2005). On this note, Kymlicka has done extensive work on the needs for these demands to be respected and accommodated rather than suppressed or ignored (Kymlicka, 2004, 2012) as has Eisenberg and others in their analysis of minorities within minorities. What we can notice however in the case of the Shi'i community in Canada is the need for recognition stems from a belief that there is a sense of responsibility attached to civic engagement, a spiritual duty that guides their actions and fear about the repercussions of fully engaging as Shi'a Muslim Canadians.

An example of these dimensions of multiculturalism can be found in the stories told by Amin, a scholar and an educator:

When we came here we were the Shi'i community, decades passed and when we believed we will be living here for a very long time[...] now we think of ourselves as Canadians, we are now Muslim Canadians – decades passed and we think very differently now, we will get involved in politics, we have civic responsibilities, we have political responsibilities, we have a responsibility to build this country; to collaborate in bringing up this country. To build this community- our understanding

of self has changed significantly – we do have connection to our home countries but the Canadian identity is now much more pronounced.

For Amin, being a Canadian and a good citizen was first summed up in being an active member of the larger Muslim Canadian community, a significant change in terms of political participation compared to what it was like in their home countries. On political participation, Amin shared that being involved in politics and being an active member of the society constituted a sense of responsibility that came with responsible citizenship. Amin spoke of his sense of belonging to the community which in his own words is “ the association to history and values and practices to that community” however, his sense of belonging as a Canadian goes beyond belonging to only one particular community, particularly within the diversity that exists in Canada, saying :“[my sense of] belonging to the community goes beyond our [Shi’i] community – sharing their challenges and concerns but not limiting my ethical responsibility for only Shi’i Muslims.”

At the same time, Amin spoke of marginalization and misrecognition as a social struggle that Shi’i Muslims had a moral and spiritual responsibility to stand up to it. To Amin, being Canadian comes with certain rights but he recognizes that “[just because] we’ve got rights it does not mean we are [entitled to them] it doesn’t mean that we are going to be able to exercise it” emphasizing that this is not specifically a Shi’i Muslims issue but in fact a serious issue that has impacted for decades minority communities such as Black communities, Indigenous communities and all groups who have faced marginalization and oppression. It is a struggle that continues on for various different communities and is not limited to the Shi’i diaspora. In Amin’s articulation of fighting for our given rights as Canadian citizens he argues that “if we want to see justice we have to see it in our

communities we have to start by effecting those in our circle of care- starting with family, community, society, then nation”.

A fundamental principle within the Shi’i doctrine, is the concern with the oppressed (Al-Muzaffar, 1982; S. H. Nasr, 1988) and within the context of the narrative of Karbala, freedom and justice go hand in hand; so Amin’s articulation in the context of defining the impacts of marginalization and misrecognition on identity formation is a manifestation of this Shi’i doctrine. Freedom and justice, the core values within the Shi’i doctrine (el-Husseini, 2008), are not simply in the context of rights within a society, they are to be acquired through political participation and struggle.

Thus, fighting marginalization and misrecognition to Amin is not about the Canadian rights that he has been given as a citizen but a human right for all marginalized groups. He added, “The heart and soul of Shi’ism is the moral values that we have and that’s what must define us- our moral values are justice and freedom.” Therefore, the perceived notion of marginalization for Amin is more than a political cause that needs to be stood against but one that stems from a religious duty. As he articulated this further by referencing Karbala and what Hussein stood for, he continued: “the very sentences we hear when we grew up (From Hussein in Karbala : *in lam takun lakum deinin koono ahraran fi deniyakum*³⁹)[English translation: Even if you do not believe in any religion/ faith, at least be sure to live free in this world]”. Highlighting the spiritual importance and deep-rooted principle of justice and freedom for every individual, not limiting it to the Shi’i Muslims, as the importance of civic

³⁹ Bihar Al-Anwar Encyclopedia, Vol 45, page 51.

engagement and active participation not only within the Shi'i community but alongside others who are faced with similar misrecognition and marginalization is necessary.

Finally, Amin also emphasized that fear was and continues to be associated with political participation for the Shi'i Muslim Community. As an active member for his community, Amin shared with me the hesitancy that his community continue to feel when it comes to political participation and being active members of the community, He shared:

Fear plays a role,[...] we come from the countries where[the] law did not allow political freedom and those who exercised political freedom, paid dearly with their lives for speaking truth to power[so when we] come here with that baggage, [we] know that if [we] speak about the government or truth to power, [we] will suffer.

What he however identified as a changing phenomenon, like Mahin, was the attitude of the younger generation towards their level of participation as community members and their connection to their Canadian identity. He shared:

[...]we do have connection to our home countries but the Canadian identity is now much more pronounced especially for the new generation, and what that is doing is not only changing our structures but it's changing the manner in which the discourse takes place within the community; now we are using a Canadian framework in the discourse, an interesting change in the Shi'i community[...].

Amin, like other participants in this study, sees the younger generation as a fierce and courageous force who are unafraid to voice their concerns regarding the marginalization that they face within the larger Muslim community. As Liyakat Takim, a religious scholar at McMaster University suggests, future Shi'i generations are much more well equipped to face the challenges their communities face particularly as they “develop their sense of

patriotism...[which leads them to] a greater politicization of the community and a sense of national consciousness”(Takim, 2018, p. 86). What Amin is referring to is the measures this community is taking to seek recognition, through equitable participation (Fraser, 2008).

Active community work for this minority is hence resistance, motivated by religious conviction, in the face of denial and marginalization that they face. What is noticeable in the work of this community and the stories they shared with me is their use of liberal ideas of equality, minority rights and human rights in their discourse (Degli Esposti & Scott-Baumann, 2019), not only when they spoke of their Canadian-ness and their appreciation of Canada’s multiculturalism but also when they spoke of the story of Hussein and his struggle in the face of injustice, weaving the historical narratives of the past to the liberal thought of today to resist marginalization and victimhood for their present and their future in Canada.

Interestingly, the two youngest participants in this study also demonstrated these intersecting themes of identifying as Canadians but also marginalization within Canada as a whole and within the larger Muslim community. Ahmed, a young university student spoke about his multi-layered identity, as a Shi’i Muslim Canadian man. He spoke of his parents’ fear for him as he considers himself vocal on political issues, having faced direct threat to life back home, his mother, especially, continually asks him to “keep your head down”. He understands where that fear comes from but for him, he is a Canadian whose rights under the multicultural policy promise, are protected.

I see personally myself as a Canadian. That I would call myself Canadian, but I understand that some people don’t see me as that. I think I am a Canadian and if I go back to [home country] for example people see me as a foreigner and I am always aware of the situation when I am not from either place. I feel I have an identity that

goes beyond where I was born; it's like I am not tied to this country because I wasn't born it [...]is not something you choose - I am always reminded that I am a Muslim and that I am different.

Ahmed thus shared with me in the context of the larger Canadian community, that a sense of belonging continues to be an issue. On the other hand, he has also felt excluded and marginalized by the larger Muslim community:

when I hang out with other Muslims who are not Shi'i that is the first thing that comes up, the differentiating factors, like oh you don't do this but we do so why aren't you doing what we do, so it's usually the first thing that comes up that marks the faith in[terms of] differences so that is one of the things that I think of I am, a Shi'i Muslim I guess.

He added, "I think being a Shi'i Muslim gives me a different perspective than a lot of people here. I think I am better off where I see things from two different perspectives, my Canadian perspective and my Shi'i perspective [and] those are two different perspectives."

Ahmed also believes that incidents of marginalization or stigmatization shouldn't be left un-checked. He shared with me an incident that took place while he and his friend were attending a youth camp with the larger Muslim community in BC. From what Ahmed mentioned to me, the event was organized as a summer youth camp by a Muslim association in BC. During the prayer time, as they prepared to stand in prayer with others "as a sign of unity we decided to pray with them" he was then [approached by a leader of the other community] and was told "we cannot pray together, we follow the Sunnah and we are going to pray our way and you should pray your prayer". Ahmed opposed this decision and the following day he spoke about the incident to the leader of their group who contacted the

leader of the other community to discuss the incident. Ahmed received an apology on the following day, which speaks to the importance of standing up to these sorts of injustices to combat them when we can. Receiving an apology and a further explanation for the incident was important to Ahmed, receiving it meant he was respected and acknowledged.

Just like Ahmed, Leila, a young professional who is a recent university graduate and works at a financial institution was one of the youngest participants in this study. Although she was born elsewhere, she has lived all of her life in Canada. She considers Canada home, but she referred to her country of origin as her ‘home country’. She is active in her community centre but indicated that she would like to be more engaged in the community centre. Leila believes that her engagement in civic activities to be part of her religious obligations “I want to be able to be out there more, I want to see things in bigger scale- I want to see people succeeding [I want] others to see it”. As she spoke about the number of charity works she is involved in, she spoke about how nothing should hold them back, regardless of the opposition or even fear that they sometimes receive, as this struggle is also rooted in what Hussein stood for “I think about my own struggles and feel like if God loves them so much and they struggled so its ok if I am going though it”. Once again in this story the demands for recognition is informed by religious conviction even for the younger generation.

My interview with Malika, one of the very active members of this community, was rather an emotional one as frustration of the marginalization of her community, feels very personal to her. To Malika, being included in a community among others and being respected and valued as equal citizens is a human right. Malika spoke about the help her community offered to the newly arrived Syrian refugees but how that simple act of giving was rejected

by the larger Muslim community solely because the help was coming from the Shi'i community. This decision left them feeling unwanted and alienated from the Muslim Canadian community.

I felt very blessed to help with the Syrian families- but I was so disappointed that other Muslims rejected our help- I felt proud because as Shi'i Muslims we are not taught that we shouldn't help others who are in the same faith as us- in fact we help all – we need to be on our best with other human beings because we are representing God- He doesn't discriminate- [so why should we?] you don't need help, well that is your loss- we kept persevering and we kept doing what was right. Our community members began to learn about what was happening- and thinking what the hell?- in that light? What makes Shi'i Muslims different?

Malika spoke about the impact this had on their community, the rejection and marginalization made them question their value and place within the community they have called home for decades. To Malika and many others, fighting that sense of marginalization is a struggle that they are hoping to overcome one day but knowing that as a minority within a minority it is not easy: “we fight everyday so hard and still not included – they have the loudest voice- it hurts you”.

Her experiences with marginalization from within the larger Muslim community has led her to believe that the discrimination she faces is one that is from within. This refusal to accept this condition of marginalization in these stories is grounded in the idea that their religious convictions hold them responsible to fight against this sort of injustice.

Marginalization was an absolute injustice that needed to be corrected, based on two equally important principles for Canadian Shi'i Muslims. Firstly, the multicultural nature of Canada

that promises “overcoming barriers to full participation”(Wayland, 1997) and secondly the religious conviction that is imbedded in the story of Hussein; to never yield to “a life of humiliation⁴⁰”.

As the participants shared their stories with me, I began to look for answers to questions of where do such groups find solutions to the problem of misrecognition, as the participants described above in various ways, that impacts their everyday lives in Canada whether from Canadian society itself or the Muslim community? From whom do they seek help and guidance when faced with forces outside their control that question their sense of belonging and the role they can play within their communities? How do they ensure that the sense of victimization that caused them to leave their home countries doesn't become a burden in this new 'home'?

The multicultural nature of Canada was seen as a powerful force that changed some participants' attitudes towards diversity and their own attitude to the recognition of others within Canadian society “I [have] become more pluralistic, I guess. The multicultural nature of Canada has shaped me now I am more accepting of others – the attitude of we are the chosen ones – I don't have that anymore- my own kids have shaped me – they embrace all faiths- I am tolerant of others” Maysa claimed.

Of course, supporters of multiculturalism would see this as one of the strengths of multiculturalism, the impact it has on immigrant communities, aligned with the optimistic multicultural model that promotes the view that “to be a Canadian is to be tolerant of diversity and to welcome and celebrate new minorities” (Wright, Johnston, Citrin, & Soroka, 2017, p. 108). An assumption that to be a Canadian is synonymous with tolerance,

⁴⁰ Hayhāt minnā l-dhillā- in Arabic: (هَيْهَاتَ مِنَّا الدَّلَّةُ) means "never to humiliation" is cited in the narrative of Shi'i tradition historically attributed to Hussien's famous quote on the day of Ashura in the Battle of Karbala.

unfortunately is an assertion far-fetched from reality, particularly in light of the presence of Islamophobia in Canada. Thus, while multiculturalism may have led some of the participants I interviewed to describe themselves as more tolerant of others, the reverse was not equally the case as evidenced by stories of the impact of Islamophobia within multicultural Canada.

A study in 2016 assessed the effects of political multiculturalism on tolerance aimed at understanding how public opinion on religious accommodation is influenced and informed. The study demonstrated a “Muslim exceptionalism” level of tolerance, which showed tolerance was “clearly in shorter supply for Muslims than for other groups”(Wright et al., 2017, p. 125). In addition, Wright et al. found an extra layer of discrimination, namely from within their own communities. An account given by one participant about her inability to disclose her Shi’i identity in the private Islamic school that she was employed at provides stark evidence of anti-Shi’i sentiment and the fear instilled in her as a result. She concealed her Shi’i identity because she feared dismissal based on her religious identity. She recognizes her Canadian-ness in light of her tolerance for others, the development of her identity that is now much more accepting than when she was in her country of origin many years ago:

I perceive the fear or the non-acceptance- I was on contract [in a private Islamic School] and I was very careful not to disclose because if the families [of those kids I teach] find out I could see that I could lose that job – parents complain and they could fire me because of that.

She also describes her sense of self as “I would first identify myself as a Shi’i Canadian because I have been living here for 30 years – but I am a proud Canadian as faith is very important to me. Tolerance here of course in this instance, is not reciprocal in this private school. Her sense of tolerance is learnt, and her sense of fear, from disclosing her own

identity is also recognized through her interactions with other members of the society with whom she lives. This complexity leads to an important issue as we think about the fact that identity is constructed dialogically (Taylor, 1994), through a process of mutual recognition. Where recognition from others is essential in developing a sense of self, without it that sense of denied recognition or “misrecognition” causes one’s self to suffer a distortion and an injury to one’s identity. A sense of misrecognition by the larger Muslim community is what these narratives speak to, making these forms of misrecognition a distinct from of injustice from the misrecognition of Islamophobia and speak to the issue of a minority within a minority, because nothing can be done about it. The participants I spoke to are fully aware that multicultural policies and practices of Canada promote inter-group equality whereas they see the onus of promotion of intra-group equity remains on themselves.

If this is the case, a related and interesting finding in some of the participants’ narratives was the expression of a sudden feeling of guilt that “they are not doing enough” to address this intra-group issue. One participant shared with me that “we can play a greater role- as a community we are very organized, we’ve got a lot of potential, we can be very active out there- we were trying to build just ourselves but now we should be part of a larger *Ummah* (larger Muslim community)”. The idea that more could be done was a common theme in every narrative shared by the participants. Where the misrecognition has created a condition where there is a sense of responsibility and an onus on the minority group to achieve intra-group equality, adding to it at times an undeserved layer of feeling of guilt and shortcoming.

The problematic issue here is twofold: first is the sense of exclusion and marginalization imposed on them regardless of the rights they are promised as members of

the society and the second is their sense of rejection or misrecognition for their efforts which significantly affects not only their right for equal participation and equal citizenship but also their 'self-esteem'. Multiculturalism insists that individuals should be free to express their ethnic identity and should not be subject to stigmatization, discrimination, prejudice from the dominant culture/society along with the central principle that ethnicity and diversity is a component of Canadian identity (Kymlicka, 2004).

The insistence of many of the participants on active participation stems from historical injustices that they faced both in their home countries as well as the historical narratives that has always been grounded in victimhood as Shi'i Muslims. Their persistence on working actively to ensure the recognition of their specific ethno-religious identities within the Muslim community should not be taken as evidence for their failed integration but on the contrary that a multicultural citizenship should promote the idea of being a proud and an active Shi'i Canadian citizen which is exactly what the original multiculturalism policy was set out to do. However, the question that remains is when it comes to the intra-group equality and the challenges faced by the minorities within minorities, what can a new model of an ambitious multiculturalism that can specifically address these concerns look like? How are conditions of marginalization addressed so a sense of belonging can become a right without the Shi'i Muslim community bearing the burden of actively fighting to seek it? How to solve the ongoing issue of minorities subject to oppression both in relation to Islamophobia in the larger Canadian society as well as the oppression of being a minority within a minority?

The narratives shared in this chapter are representative of what the participants told me about their experiences more generally. I have aimed through their narratives to present a

picture of the everyday lives of the participants as expressed by them. Their ongoing invisibility in multicultural policy and theory and continuous misrecognition is met with their refusal to accept this situation, particularly amongst a younger generation, leading them to trust that the solution to these cultural exclusions is to re-assert their cultural identities in public spaces. This solution is a definitive no, a sort of a protest (Dabashi, 2011) that re-victimization cannot be an option particularly under the promise of multiculturalism in this new 'home'. My argument ultimately from this chapter is that their refusal of this sense of marginalization and misrecognition as articulated above along with their attempt at actively seeking recognition, through civic engagement and community work stems from religious conviction and a sense of moral responsibility rooted within the Shi'i consciousness rather than the rights supposedly given to them under the promise of Canadian multiculturalism policy. Since resistance and standing up to injustice are at the core of Shi'i identity (el-Husseini, 2008), so ingrained in Shi'ism that this form of insistence on active citizenship within Canada could not be possible without it, as multiculturalism policy and its promise of their protection has yet to prove itself in practice.

In the narratives of the participants of this study, the positive aspects of multiculturalism was expressed in their personal interactions and lived experiences for each one of them. Multiculturalism was defined in light of their personal experiences, in their personal expressions such as 'tolerance' and 'acceptance'. In theory, to the participants of this study, diversity was celebrated in their stories, as it was one of the important features of multiculturalism in Canada one that was referenced in a positive light. However, what could be observed in the analysis of the stories of marginalization that they spoke of, and the

discrimination that they have experienced, the reality is that multiculturalism did not and has not yet lived up to its theoretical promise.

In the next chapter I move from the questions raised in these various narratives about the problem of misrecognition as both a Muslim within Islamophobic Canada and a Shi'i within the Muslim community in Canada to illustrate the actions they have been taking as a community to respond to these forms of injustice and try to increase their visibility as a small community that continues to struggle for recognition and equitable participation.

Chapter 4: Equitable Participation: A Political Responsibility and a Religious Duty *Shi'i Muslim Diaspora in BC and civic engagement*

“Remember Ashura[...] It will show you a path of action, and provide an answer to the recurring question “What should be done?” It will help you decide on the best agenda for the struggle against the rule of tyranny. It will avoid allegiance to cruelty. It will provide a pattern for the unbroken continuity of history.” -Ali Shariati

As I began conducting my interviews, three of the participants I interviewed, citizens of a country⁴¹ where the Shi'i minority is heavily repressed by the state, requested to withdraw from the study only days later. There had been political unrest in their home countries as Shi'i protesters, demanding equal rights, were jailed. I was aware that the simple act of defining the Shi'i Muslim identity, its position in the current Middle East political climate, its relation to the historical narratives was in itself seen as a political act for many, particularly those minorities who are marginalized under authoritative regimes that are threatened by expressions of identities. Their demand to withdraw was not surprising to me, both as a Shi'i Muslim as well as a scholar, as I came across various other researchers who articulated this fear of expressing the Shi'i identity particularly in Europe where the Shi'i identity was the focus of various studies in recent years. Bøe and Flaskerud (2017), for example, highlighted this very idea as they studied a Shi'i community in Norway, in their study they articulated that “considering that many Shi'i migrants have fled religious persecution, some might also be cautious of revealing their religious identity and choose instead to conceal their religious belief” (Bøe & Flaskerud, 2017, p. 183).

In the case of the participants in this study, their stories contained no explicit mention of their political participation or activism in their home countries, no indication of them

⁴¹ Due to the fact, they have asked not to be included in this study, fearing for their lives and the lives of their families, I've also decided not to include the name of the country respecting their anonymity and request.

being involved in any political event or cause but they spoke of their religious identities and at its core, the responsibility to act in the face of oppression. They were however cautious, that even telling their stories of marginalization from back home could potentially in itself be perceived as political, which they wanted to avoid at all costs as they have families back in their home countries. In my observation, the sense of responsibility they spoke of was always in a religious context, it was imbedded within how they defined their Shi'i Muslim identities with a special focus on the historical narrative of Hussein in Karbala.

This insistence on responsibility (Al-Muzaffar, 1982), on the need for action in the face of injustice (Dabashi, 2011) no matter on a grand or a small scale, imbedded within a sense of religious responsibility to act in the face of oppression (Vaezi, 2004) shapes the Shi'i politico-religious identity, as discussed. It is an identity that is rooted in remembrance of a historical narrative of Hussein in the face of injustice, also shown in the stories of the participants in this study. One that is meant to show a “a path of action”⁴², founded on a *political spirituality*⁴³ inspired by events of Karbala. I reference Foucault's ‘political spirituality’ that he coined as he wrote about the revolution in Iran in 1979 to highlight the significance of the spiritual power within Shi'ism that aimed to confront oppression and marginalization. Once again, as I have discussed in chapter one, I am using the Iranian revolution of 1979 as an example because it was specifically a Shi'i Muslim revolution that was inspired and mobilized by the story of Hussein in Karbala. Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi , a

⁴² Excerpt from Red Shi'ism (the religion of martyrdom) Vs. Black Shi'ism (the religion of mourning) By Dr. Ali Shariati. Full Translated version available at:

https://archive.org/stream/AliShariatiRedAndBlackShiism/Ali%20Shari'ati_Red%20and%20Black%20Shi'ism_djvu.txt

⁴³ “political spiritualité” was used by Foucault in his analysis of the revolution in Iran in 1979 as he wrote about the connection between religion and politics and the self in relation to Shi'i Islam and its effect on the Iranian revolution. Quoted in the *Nouvel Observateur*, no.1283, June 8-14, 1998; as well as Michel Foucault, “Questions of Method,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 73–86.

sociologist, in his book, *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Revolution after the Enlightenment* argues that Foucault offers a unique perspective when he introduced political spirituality which he defines as ‘making history through the transformation of self’ (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2016). In his analysis, Tabrizi, makes an argument that to Foucault, Shi’ism provided Iranians with a ‘sense of self’ and a ‘tool kit for achieving their vision for a just society’, with that, Tabrizi argues that Foucault offers an alternative view on how he observed the revolution and the spiritual motivation that led to it because he was not an expert on Shi’ism nor was he an expert on Iranian people which helps provide a unique perspective. I am using the example of the Iranian revolution to illustrate, as Tabrizi argues, the “significance of Shi‘ism, both as a feature of the popular cultural endowment and as a liberation theology, in the 1978–79 revolutionary movement.” He further writes, “ Shi‘ism in the revolutionary context gave political expression to basic principles of justice that corresponded to what Hegel termed *Sittlichkeit* [ethical life] that is, the customs, norms, and expectations inherent in the conception of the good life” (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2016, p.20). Tabrizi places a special emphasis on the story of Karbala and the impact it had on mobilizing the revolution in Iran, citing the slogan “Every day is Ashura, every land is Karbala” as the one slogan that advanced the revolution in its mission to fight injustice at the time (Ghamari-Tabrizi, 2016) in pursuit of a just, (good) life in the face of the oppressive Pahlavi regime.

The story of Karbala, is a central trauma and paradigm of Shi’ism (Hegland, 2004), that throughout history led and continues to be “a nexus of emotive responses and political instincts” (Dabashi, 2011, p. 86) in the ongoing construction and articulation of the Shi’i political identity; no matter where they are in the world, whether in their home countries or within their diasporic communities around the world. Connecting historical events to the

present, in a communal setting, thorough collective remembering (Wertsch & Roediger, 2008) has also become part of the everyday and personal lives of its members. Communal spaces and centers of Shi'i Muslim diasporas are such places. They do not only serve as a physical religious place for congregation, but a space where remembrance takes place, where historical narratives are told, deconstructed, re-articulated to fit with the reality of the present. In the first chapter I shared a personal story of my own lived experiences in such space, where the story of Hussein represents a timeless principle to live and act by, one that demonstrate the collective power of resistance and persistence in the face of injustice and oppression that is expressed through historical religious narratives and analogies (Shanneik, 2015). In this chapter I aim to shed light on how the historical narrative of Hussein in Karbala, even within the migratory context, inspires action and is used to denounce and fight marginalization for the participants in this study.

In recent year, diasporic communities, their way of life and their communal spaces began to be of immense interest to the host countries (Sheffer, 2003). Researchers began to conduct extensive research to study and examine in much depth, minority diasporic communities, their transnational existence (Werbner, 2002) their connection and civic attentiveness to their home countries (Isaakyan & Triandafyllidou, 2018) their social formation and their networks (Brubaker, 2005) as well as their activities within the world order. Nevertheless, with the increase in immigration and the current world order and rapid globalization, nationalism and religious fundamentalism that has impacted every part of the world there is still a need for a much more extensive and comprehensive studies of diasporas worldwide (Sheffer, 2003). While I acknowledge that this study of a small number of members of the Shi'i Muslim diaspora in BC is an extremely small step that is scratching the

surface for this particular diaspora, my hope is that it can provide a starting point to a much-needed conversation around the rights of minorities within minorities which are often overlooked. Specifically the religious diaspora communities who are “the other within the other”(Takim, 2009, p. 143) in Canada as is the case with the Shi’i Muslims diaspora in British Columbia. A community that entails another layer in its complexity to this research, one that is distinctly imbued as a politico-religious community whose members view civic engagement and community work as a political responsibility and a religious duty.

The focus of this chapter is on the question of participation and how to ensure it is equitable across various kinds of citizens in Canada. Scholars have shown a clear indication that proves the role of religious institutions in mobilization and promotion of civic participation of members (Jamal, 2005; Jones-Correa & Leal, 2001; Putnam, 2000). In Verba, Schlozman, and Brady’s *Voice and Equality*, as the relationship between the political life and social life in relation to religious institution is examined, they argue that “the institutions with which individuals are associated as they move through life[...]the non-political organizations and religious institutions with which they become affiliated- produce the factors that foster participation”(Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995, p. 17).

Building on that, in Jones-Correa and Leal’s study *Political Participation: Does Religion matter?* they test Verba’s theory to conclude that in fact religious institutions play a key role in “the inculcation of individual’s civic skills”(Jones-Correa & Leal, 2001, p. 754) . They argue that religious institutions in particular act as the central civic association in the lives of the members, confirming the importance of associational membership in terms of civic engagement (Verba et al., 1995) highlighting the important effects of associational membership in general and religion in particular on political participation (Jones-Correa &

Leal, 2001; Putnam, 2000). It is important to consider the centrality of religion in the lives of the participants in this study whose community is the only form of associational membership (Jones-Correa & Leal, 2001) particularly as they feel there is prevalent marginalization by the larger Muslim community. That sense of marginalization has imposed on them restrictive levels of participation and engagement within the larger Muslim community such as the example I discussed in the first two chapters of the dissertation with the assistance that this community offered to the newly arrived Syrian families. I discussed above that their insistence and persistence were extraordinary, one that was insisting on participation, engagement and inclusion, while resisting marginalization and othering imposed on them by other communities as their offer to help those in need was denied. This is consistent with what Iris Young has identified as a form of oppression in her *Five Faces of Oppression* article, where she argues that marginalization is a form of oppression as it expels and alienates and denies equal opportunity and social cooperation (Young, 1988). In turn, this community found inspiration from the message of Hussein to resist this form of oppression as evident by the stories they have shared and will further discuss in this chapter. As I witnessed their enthusiasm, their persistence and organized community work, I wanted to know more. I wanted to learn about why do they insist on helping when their help in this context was unwelcomed by others around them? Why and in what ways do they resist this, unfair, imposed marginalization? Why did they want to help even more after they were told they shouldn't? What motivated their persistence? What motivated their resistance? In this chapter my aim is to shed light on these questions; the "unlikely forms of resistance[...] the neglected forms of resistance" (Abu-Lughod, 1990, p. 41), the motivations behind their insistence on community work and civic participation because as Mary Hegland suggests if

we “overlook subtle, covert, undeclared, or even unknowing forms of resistance, we are leaving out a vast area of political activity”(Hegland, 2004, p. 258) as it is through these ‘everyday forms of resistance’ (Scott, 1985) that they give meaning to their everyday.

Drawing on Verba, Schlozman, and Brady’s work on political participation *voice and equality* are defined as central to democratic participation (Verba et al., 1995, p.3), similarly to what the Canadian multicultural policy is rooted in, equitable participation and promotion of ethnocultural diversity (J. W. Berry & Kalin, 2007). In Verba, Schlozman, and Brady’s work, they define participatory process, based on two main factors; one is the motivation, and the other is the capacity to take part in political life (Verba et al., 1995). By carefully highlighting the distinction between political participation and non-political participation, where political participation is defined as one that has a direct impact on influencing government action , in terms of public policy, and the non-political participation is defined as a voluntary non-political activity in both religious and secular domains (Verba et al., 1995). With that, I argue that for this particular community, the political and the non-political means are already intertwined. The political participation tends to increase visibility of their community among others by resisting and rejecting all forms of marginalization through their voluntary non-political activity, which is in itself motivated by a *political spirituality* that aims to resist any forms of oppression and marginalization.

The stories that are shared by the participants in this study are based on their lived experiences and will guide the themes of this chapter which aims to look at *a)* the motivation; their drive to civic engagement and *b)* the intersection between the political and the non-political voluntary community work; their articulation of resistance as an inseparable combination of political responsibility and a religious duty.

4.1 Motivation for Civic-Engagement: Past, Present and the Future

“We must define ourselves in terms of our moral stance[...]the heart and soul of Shi’ism is the moral values that we have and that’s what must define us[our central] moral values are justice and freedom[...] we need to look at Karbala with a sense of moral stands and moral growth— these values are what’s important in Islam- we should be known by these values[...]-Amin

The incentive for civic-engagement within the community along with the other communities was articulated by the participants in this study in multifaceted forms. There was a past, a present and a future component in their articulation of civic-engagement. The past was always in reference to the historical narrative of Hussein, the present was always in light of the global context or Shi’i victimhood as they defined it, at times, in a transnational context; places where they’re persecuted whether they are a minority or a majority as well as the domestic context, referencing their marginalization by the larger Muslim community here in Canada. In terms of the future, the reference was to reconstruct and rebuild a better future where marginalization and re-victimization can be overcome or at the very least be minimized. Participatory action, particularly in the form of civic-engagement is perceived by the participants as a moral duty with links to their spiritual upbringing that is rooted in what they referenced to as the ‘Shi’i values of justice and freedom’ imbedded in historical narratives.

Historical narratives, particularly the story of Hussein in Karbala and the events of Ashura, was the central point in every story shared by the participants of this study, where its centrality not only within the Shi’i thought but within their communal gathering during the month of Muharam of every year has shaped their collective identity that is their principle

identifiable act of communal event in their community centre. Where remembrance happens in forms of a storytelling event in the shape of a ‘collective remembering’, as “remembering constitutes an important part of their identity”(Shanneik, 2015, p. 89) making this particular community a “memory community” (Shanneik, 2015, p. 100) that unites them through a shared collective past. It is precisely this collective remembering, which is also articulated individually as in first person “I” that serves as the principle motivation for civic-engagement.

The story of Hussein was the central point of reference when the past, present and the future were discussed, just as Ali Shariati calls *a path to action*⁴⁴. In their stories the past was articulated in the forms of the discrimination and the threat to their lives as well as their family members as the result of sectarian violence in their home countries.

The transnational dimension of the Shi’i identity was ever present in their stories. The connection between ‘here’ and ‘there’ as they spoke about Canada and ‘back-home’, to be a Shi’i Muslim ‘here’ and to be a Shi’i Muslim ‘there’, the relation between the local and the global dimension (Ali, 2019) of the Shi’i self-identification highlights the importance of the religio-political dimensions of their identities particularly in the diasporic spaces away from home countries that they have left specifically due to the religious persecution they had faced. Interestingly this point was made by the youngest two participants, who continue to distinguish between the challenges that the Shi’i identity faces here in Canada and back home even though they have never really lived in what they addressed as ‘back home’, highlighting

⁴⁴ Expert from Red Shi’ism (the religion of martyrdom) vs. Black Shi’ism (the religion of mourning) By Dr. Ali Shariati. Full Translated version available at: https://archive.org/stream/AliShariatiRedAndBlackShiism/Ali%20Shari'ati_Red%20and%20Black%20Shi'ism_djvu.txt

the transgenerational trauma⁴⁵ in their own narratives as they come to define their own identities.

When Ahmed began to tell me about how he defines his Shi'i identity here in Canada, he focused on how difficult it is to really define his sense of belonging as he feels he is "not really from here and not really from there". He spoke of the sense of marginalization that he has experienced both here and there, even though he was persistent throughout the interview that he sees himself as a Canadian regardless of the marginalization that he experiences both in light of Islamophobia and anti-Shi'i sentiments. Being a Shi'i Muslim back home was associated with "anti-Shi'i" sentiments and on a personal level, his story about his uncle was shared with me as such "a lot of Shi'is are being directly targeted[there]... I think my uncle who's my dad's cousin was actually targeted and killed because he was a doctor at the hospital because of his [Shi'i]name."

Ahmed recounts the cautious attitude his parents take in revealing much about their Shi'i identities even when they have been living in Canada for decades. As Ahmed told me about his experiences here in Canada he continued to make references to news stories that he follows on daily basis as they relate to the persecution of Shi'i Muslims in his home country⁴⁶. To Ahmed, his Shi'i identity is shaped by that global discourse, the reality of what

⁴⁵ I acknowledge that a more thorough study of trauma particularly as articulated by the Shi'is Muslim community is also needed but it is well beyond the scope of this dissertation. On that note, I have found relevant studies that have looked at the effects of premigration trauma and one in particular offers a unique and timely perspective. In their article, "*Mental Health Effects of Premigration Trauma and Postmigration Discrimination on Refugee Youth in Canada*", Morton Beiser and Feng Hou examine the role of pre-and post-migration trauma on refugee youth. They highlight the problem that exists when survivors of persecution arrive, often times what happens to them after arrival is neglected by the host countries as they continue to suffer significant mental health problems. In their findings they highlight health and social services to help repair the mental health damage of premigration experience is only one aspect of the host country's responsibility as avoiding further harm by combating discrimination is equally important (Beiser & Hou, 2016).

⁴⁶ The Human Rights Watch has identified the anti-Shi'i violence in Pakistan in recent years as alarming This is of course not to say that extremism in Pakistan has not targeted Sunni Muslims as well, as both Sunni and Shi'i Muslim have been targeted by terror groups in recent years.

happens ‘here’ and ‘there’ are intertwined as one informs the other. Unlike what his parents, who continue to tell him to “keep your head down and do not get involved in politics”. Ahmed sees his position here in Canada as an opportunity to be an active member of his community whose hope and aspiration is to change the perception of Shi’i Muslims as helpless victims to that of active members who continue to challenge any sort of imposition to marginalize them. To him, Hussein plays a central role of inspiration that guides him in life. He defines his Shi’i identity as it has “to do with what I think is right and wrong and what is my purpose”. In his understanding of Shi’i identity, Hussein plays a central role “we believe he was unfairly treated though ordeal of Ashura and Karbala [...]I think a part of Shi’i identity is struggling against a larger force that may not be part of a just force and I think that is a big part of Shi’i identity. Probably not the whole part but a significant part I would say”.

Placing a significant emphasis on the historical narratives in relation to the current positioning of self. Ahmed’s self-identification is rooted in the historical narrative of Hussein, his parents’ lived experiences as a persecuted minority and his own lived experiences of marginalization here in Canada. In Ahmed’s narrative the past and the present, the religious and the political are all intertwined and that what makes him who he is. He is unable to deconstruct any of those notions as they are interwoven, inseparable concepts that inform his active role in his community that will be discussed in the next part of this chapter in more details.

The second youngest participant, just like Ahmed, has lived almost all of her life in Canada. Yet, sectarian violence back home was a defining feature in her narrative as she told me about herself. Once again, the Shi’i identity was defined in the context of the challenges

‘here’ and ‘there’. Leila told me about her experience on one of her visits to her home-country where the colour of her clothes could’ve meant the choice between life and death. Her visit corresponded with the mourning period of Ashura at the time where it is traditional custom for Shi’i mourners to wear black for three days as a sign of mourning. She told me how she was warned for the first time in her life that wearing all black could put her life in danger if she is publicly seen:

It was dangerous because you don’t want to be at the wrong place at the wrong time and so I remember going to a shopping centre and I was told not to wear black because when mourning they were black for three days – even outside- so they said don’t wear black because you don’t want to identify yourself as a Shi’i – because anything could happen –so I mean, I have never thought about it – so here I don’t have to worry about it when I wear black – but over there you have to be very careful.

In Leila’s story, she focused on telling me about this particular incident because she wanted to speak about how the simplest things, such as wearing black in public could also be potentially dangerous and could put her life at risk in her ‘home country’. In my observance, this story was of significance to Leila, who has lived almost all of her life in Canada, where the colours of one’s clothes are never meant to identify one’s religious identity.

Leila told me about the freedom that she enjoys here, where she dresses in black because no one can be a threat to her while she upholds her religious practice during mourning.

To Leila wearing black, during Ashura, is a small act of defiance and self-expression as a Shi’i Muslim here in Canada, a small act of identity representation, that she values and appreciates. Leila shared with me the story of her brother who came under attack during the tense sectarian-tension that had risen in her home country one year:

Five years ago where there was a lot of tension between Shi'i and Sunni Muslims and [my brother] was once asked about a CD in his car that had Hussein's name on it (something that identified him as a Shi'i) and his mom said I don't want you to be identified as a Shi'i! – I definitely noticed the difference here and back home- so my brother was targeted about 5 or 6 years ago [back home] and it was totally random – they identified him as a Shi'i because he left the city which was Shi'i dominated and so he was driving in the highway and bullets were fired at his car – and he drove past it and he doesn't remember how the heck he got out of there, but he got out of there – and that was around a time where there was a lot of tension between Shi'is and Sunnis and that is the one thing I remember because it was close to home.

Immediately after, Leila shared with me another story that she was told by her parents “my parents [told me about a story from] 25 years ago – where a bunch of their family members were at a mosque and Sunni extremists came and randomly lined them against a wall and shot them all- I think you can read about it⁴⁷ – al murtaza Masjid- -that's kind of the only stories I have heard”. Leila shared these stories with me as she was attempting to define her Shi'i identity here in Canada, these stories were shared spontaneously without me as a researcher ever asking for such details. In exploring how she wanted to define how she perceived her own Shi'i Muslim Canadian identity, such stories emerged organically. Her definition of Shi'i identity was just as Ahmed's a mix of the past and the present. Leila's definition of a Shi'i Muslim Canadian is constructed within the historical narratives that she

⁴⁷ As Leila provided the details about this incident, I was able to find the article that she referenced. Article can be found here: <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/02/25/world/gunmen-slay-18-at-mosques-in-pakistan.html>

grew up with. She told me that for her being a Shi'i is "following or looking at examples from Hussein [...] - and listening to the stories whether in crisis or not" She added:

Yesterday, I read a story about how much difficulties Hussein went through as a child and as an adult – when I have a problem I look at the struggle that Hussein had and I think about [his] struggle and I think about my own struggles and feel like if God loves them so much and they struggled so its ok if I am going through it – so I think in terms of spirituality I feel like I identify with the [work of] historians a lot in terms of practicing, you know, Islam- it is sometime difficult but spiritually wise I do identify with the [work of] historians a lot.

There is something different in Ahmed and Leila's stories; the youngest participants both in their 20's. The stories they shared with me about their family members and relatives who were attacked for being Shi'i Muslims in their home countries were told in detail, with a particular sort of emphasis and focus that was absent in other stories. They were detailed with a strange sort of poignancy, as if they were told to them many, many times, as if those stories had become part of who they were when they defined their own Shi'i identities. These stories were shared with me when they were asked to tell me about how they define their own Shi'i identities. To both Ahmed and Leila, who have lived most of their lives in Canada, the Shi'i identity was defined in relation to the local and global factors (Tabar, 2003), complemented with stories transmitted from the past to them, the new generation (Ricoeur, 1999). Unlike the other participants, it was only Leila and Ahmed's stories that detailed Shi'i persecution in relation to the stories from their home countries. Those stories informed their responses to the question of "how you define your Shi'i identities here in Canada"; those stories informed where is home and where is home country, the difference between 'here' and 'there', what

it's like to be 'here' and what it's like to be 'there', the threat 'here' and the threat 'there', an imposed binary that is almost always discussed in relation to a difference, in order to define itself. Unable to locate themselves in just the present as they had found their voice in the history and the stories transmitted to them. Unlike the other participants however, they were more persistent on what needs to be changed, they were more willing to challenge, resist and where possible transform that position.

Ahmed was always more vocal when it came to issues that affected him in Canada as a Shi'i Muslim. It was Ahmed who complained about being discriminated against during the youth camp experience that I shared in the previous chapter, it was also Ahmed who questioned the Member of Parliament who was invited to a community event about Canada's role in the Saudi-Arabia's arms deal. This is the same participant that I wrote about in the *Politics of Victimhood's* chapter who was told by his parents to "always keep your head down", the same young boy whose mother did not want him to draw his family tree when he was in elementary school as part of an assignment. Ahmed views his identity as a Shi'i Muslim in the context of the "news he watches" through what he called an intersectional perspective as a Muslim, Shi'i, South Asian, Canadian. Ahmed sees civic participation as a Canadian responsibility, informed by what he calls Shi'i values that call for an active religious and political life, particularly in the face of challenges such as imposed marginalization. For Ahmed, Shi'i identity is a mix of politics and faith with a transnational dimension, grounded in what Stuart Halls refers to as the local and the global (Hall, 1997).

In exploring the complexity of how identities in the diaspora are (re)constructed, I have found the work of Stuart Hall intriguingly relevant to this particular diaspora community. Hall recognizes the constant transformation of diaspora identities in terms of

‘being’ and ‘becoming’(Hall, 1990) with an emphasize on the past and the present along with the transnational component that connects ‘here’ and ‘there’(Hall, 1997) the ‘local’ and the ‘global’(Hall, 1997). Hall highlights the importance of the positionality that diasporic identities ground themselves in with a particularity that is rooted in a “place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific”(Hall, 1990, p. 222).

Hall’s recognition of the positionality of identities particularly in the past is rooted in the idea that identity is a matter of being and becoming anchored in the past as identity “belongs to the future as much as to the past”(Hall, 1990, p. 222). According to Hall, “the past continues to speak to us... It is always constructed through memory of fantasy, narrative and myth. Cultural identities are the points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position[...]"(Hall, 1990, p. 226). This is what is intriguing about how Ahmed’s and Leila’s stories, their anchors are the stories that signified their understanding of the Shi’i victimhood back in their home countries, the victimhood that was passed on to them through stories, and historical narratives but at the same time those stories serve as a position that grounds them, connects them to the past, informs their motivation to be vocal in the face of anything that is trying to silence them.

Leila and Ahmed shared with me gradual stories from the past; rooted in victimhood, which later turned into stories about the present that motivated them to be active participants; rooted in agency, which later turned into a vision for the future and the life they want to have; rooted in spiritual values that they hold dear along with its alignment to the Canadian multiculturalism that promises them “equal opportunity with other individuals to make the

life that the individual is able and wishes to have”⁴⁸. To Ahmed and Leila, identity meant stories from their home countries and the Shi’i victimhood associated with it ‘there’; lived experiences of their lives in Canada and the Shi’i marginalization associated with it ‘here’; both equally important in their articulation of their identities that were rooted in spirituality based on the historical narrative of Hussein in Karbala that continues to inform their civic participation ‘here’ in Canada.

What is especially significant in this study is the way the narrative of Hussein is positioned in the lives of the Shi’i Muslim diasporic communities and the way it speaks to various contexts. Recent researchers of Shi’i diasporic communities, particularly in Europe (Ali, 2019; Alibhai, 2018; Bøe & Flakerud, 2017; Degli Esposti, 2018; Langer, Robert, Weineck, 2017; Scharbrodt, 2018; Tabar, 2003), have shown that for Shi’i Muslim diasporas, through the reconstruction of this historical narrative, meaning is given to current political situation depending in the context and the particular positionality they find themselves in. The constructed Shi’i civil society in diasporic spaces transcends state boundaries, which in a way have created a form of “Shi’i international[ism]”(Mallat, 1993). Those Shi’i diasporic spaces of commemoration, be it community centers, mosques or *Hussaiynia*⁴⁹, have become a communal space where the story of Hussein is commemorated in relation to the context they find themselves in and as such the Shi’i places of worship have become particularly important in diasporic places “where the articulation and performance of religious identity [are] imbued with political overtones”(Degli Esposti, 2018, p. 73).

⁴⁸ preamble to the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1985.

⁴⁹ The term in Arabic and Persian is used for a communal space of congregation where Shi’i commemoration/events and mourning take place.

4.1.1 Transnational Spaces of Remembrance:

Recent exploratory research from Shi'i communal spaces in Ireland, United Kingdom, United States, Australia, remote areas in Pakistan also demonstrate the significance of remembrance of Hussein within the communal Shi'i diasporic spaces. For example, commemoration of Hussein, in London has allowed the Iraqi Shi'i Muslims exiled in the United Kingdom to use the spaces designed for commemoration to connect and find solace in exile after escaping the Iraqi Baathist state that suppressed the Shi'i religious identity for decades (Degli Esposti, 2018). Take for example how such spaces of commemoration has also created a space for the transnational connection of the Shi'i diaspora in London and their activism and long-distance nationalism (Scharbrodt, 2018). Similarly, the Shi'i diaspora of Sydney, Australia whose experiences of commemoration allows them to cope with idea of missing homeland and protecting cultural identity (Tabar, 2003) or how such spaces have become the place for exploration of diasporic cultural and religious identities of belonging to the Iraqi-British youth (Ali, 2019); or the intersection between religion and memory in a communal space that impacts the lives of Shi'i women who find meaning in their lives in Ireland (Shanneik, 2015); in addition to the role of performativity, religious performance on identity of social belonging (Degli Esposti, 2018); women's resistance and resilience in Pakistan (Hegland, 2003); as well as the relation between the role of transnational discourses particularly on women and modernity (Deeb, 2009).

These studies highlight the centrality as well as the significance of the story of Hussein in the everyday lives of the Shi'i Muslim diasporas as the story of Hussein is understood as a symbol that can be applicable to all times and contexts, transcending borders, resisting re-

victimization and informing action. Where through the reconstruction of this historical narrative meaning is given to current political situation depending on the context and the particular positionality they are in. In the examples provided above, what could be noticed is that in each case, Hussein is remembered within a particular context, relevant to that diasporic community. What I am arguing here for is that commemoration of Hussein in Karbala is the ‘anchored position’ (Hall, 1990) that calls for civic participation for the participants in this study as Hussein is commemorated every year, with the same intensity as a symbol of resistance and quest for recognition, aiming to carve a space that is equal to all the other communities around them. As “the institutions with which individuals are associated as they move through life[...]the non-political organizations and religious institutions with which they become affiliated- produce the factors that foster participation” (Jones-Correa & Leal, 2001, p. 753). For the participants of this study, Hussein is commemorated through charity works and community involvement. Being active members of the community and insisting on extending a helping hand to communities in need has become a defining feature of this particular community. In her book, *Theory of Social Remembering*, Barbara Misztal makes a compelling argument that “when groups [...] compete for public recognition and legitimization, their claims are rooted in their common memory of the suffering, victimization or exclusion”(Misztal, 2003, p. 134). Highlighting that memory is actually reconstructed as past events are recalled and revisited in a manner that is shaped by current political, religious and social contexts (Misztal, 2003; Shanneik, 2015).

4.1.2 Positionality: Personal Expressions of Karbala

What I want to do next is to explore this idea of positionality that is anchored in the narrative of Hussein as articulated by the participants, where commemoration cannot and should not “be considered a religious ritual connecting them to the past but it serves the concerns of the present” (Tabar, 2003, p. 303), as they tell me about how they define their Shi’i identity in order to further understand how this particular minority membership in religious institutions structure their political engagement (Jamal, 2005).

Amin shared with me how the past positioning of the Shi’i identities is also changing in relation and in context with the present politics of the time⁵⁰. He said “our perception of Karbala is also changing where we are not going to think of ourselves as minorities and victims”. He argued that current political events in the Middle East and particularly in lights of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 should be viewed as a significant point in history where “now Karbala changed from a story of victimhood to a story of resistance, Karbala became associated with resistance-a story of resistance- Shi’i poetry or the commemoration were full or verbiage of resistance, against oppression, [about] freedom , justice, those are ideas that are now associated with Karbala, we can see that in Lebanon , Iraq, people are taking aspiration from Karbala. That we can actually fulfill our part in our communities”. Amin highlights the distinction that exists between how Karbala and the historical narrative of Hussein was suppressed by the powerful over marginalized minorities in their home countries. What we can see in Amin’s narrative is the everchanging diasporic identities based on the conditions and the context they see themselves in, it is similar to what Hall discusses

⁵⁰ Recent political tension, rooted in sectarian violence, particularly with the raise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, in addition to the “ongoing regional power struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which, with its sectarian undertones, has exacerbated Sunni-Shi’i divisions, particularly in countries with sizeable, politicized Shi’i communities, such as Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and Bahrain.”(Saleh & Kraetzschmar, 2015, p. 547)

about the constant transformation of diasporic identities but with a stable and unchanging narrative of the past as the frame of reference (Hall, 1990). That point of reference was particularly intriguing as the participants defined their sense of identity as a “follower of Hussein...[it]is what comes to mind right away [...]the story of Hussein – makes me feel how fortunate I am – I am happy to be practicing it in the way I am practicing it now, in terms of how we raise our children the role models in our religion” according to Mahin.

For Malika, the spiritual values of Shi’ism such as Hussein in Karbala are “humanitarian [values] and all have to have it- all the values-that we believe that all humanities have to have”. These values to Malika are especially important in a multicultural society such as Canada, aligned with the liberal democracy’s idea of justice and human rights. She argues that “because of that it is easier for me to connect with people from other background and religions” citing, once again, Canada’s multiculturalism policy. Malika spoke about the special focus her faith has enabled her to have on what she calls important values, such as justice, particularly social justice, and inclusion that she attributed to Hussein and what he stood for.

In Maysa’s case, she tells me about how she sees the values of justice as central to Shi’i Muslims “even globally where there are Shi’is they raise against the injustice and against oppression- I think Hussein plays a central role [...] as it shapes our thinking as we are growing up [when he said]“I rather die than live a life of humiliation”. To many of the participants Hussein symbolizes “self-dignity and self-respect - [and to] never to submit to oppression.”

To Maryam, Hussein “Stood by example, led by example. He sacrificed for his values and fought for the right of a minority and that speaks to me” she said; she shared with me

that since she was a young girl she attended the commemoration of Hussein back in her home country and back then it was just a ritual to her with no significant meaning, however, she argues that has significantly changed as she grew up and how to her, the story of Hussein is more about what should be done next “it was only much later that I looked at what it means and what should we be doing?” She spoke of her hope and her active role in her community and the motivations that she has found in the life and death of Hussein that continue to guide her.

For Munir, a middle-aged business owner who has lived in Canada for more than 15 years, his Shi'i identity was articulated as “finally being safe” speaking specifically about physical safety and no threat to life, in a place like Canada. He spoke of his appreciation for the freedom he has here that he could be who he wants to be without fear, “so I feel very safe and very comfortable about here than any other place, because back home there are suicide bombers that target Shi'i Muslims”. He spoke of his identity as a practice that was always in need of safeguarding. Canada, according to him, had finally given him the space where he could be who he wanted to be, safely, at least within the context of physical safety. Munir did not speak much about the marginalization in here, his responses were specifically about the physical safety that he was thankful for.

In exploring the responses of the participants, their profound attachment to Hussein and the story of Karbala, as a determinant of what role they have in a society as active members was evident in every interview. The participants of this study understand their participation as active members of society especially community work in assisting the less fortunate as a responsibility, one that is rooted in how they define their sense of self as a diaspora. The religio- political usage of commemoration of Hussein is basically a motivation

and a call for action, particularly for many of them who have moved to Canada as their new place of refuge. As Mary Hegland argues in her exploration of the Shi'i women identities in North- Western Pakistan and how they have created a new meaning for why one mourns Hussein and how they have redefined those meaning to apply them for their own purposes and their own agency. In her analysis she makes a strong point that “we must look not only at teachings and preaching but what individuals make of religious and ritual in practice”(Hegland, 2003, p. 413). In attempting to further understand the Shi'i diaspora communities it is important to explore the beliefs that motivate participatory actions. Community work and their conceptualization of their own religio-political identities are closely related for the participants in this study.

In the next section I aim to shed light on this particular community's civic participation *as resistance* which is motivated by their religious conviction aiming to further understand diasporic identities and how they are shaped in migratory context.

4.2 Civic-Engagement as Resistance: Political Responsibility and a Religious Duty

In resistance, people sustain their spirits, agency, self-confidence, and self-esteem. The practice of resistance, however low-key or subtle, preserves the potential for change, although the degree to which this potential will eventually be realized can be known only in retrospect. Resistance is not only a means to the end of understanding power. Resistance is power; it is the power in the hands of the less powerful. (Hegland, 2003, p. 428)

In her exploration of the theme of resistance, Mary Hegland states that “if we overlook subtle, covert, undeclared, or even unknown forms of resistance, we are leaving out a vast area of political activity” (Hegland, 2003, p. 429). It is precisely these ‘low-key’ and ‘subtle’ acts of resistance as employed by the participants in this study as they construct and affirm

their Shi'i Canadian identity that I want to touch upon in this section. It is in these forms of every day's lived experiences where we can, as researchers understand how identity is shaped and re-shaped within the Canadian multiculturalism – and its nexus to political participation.

Resistance in this context, for this particular community, is based on their lived experiences, their struggle for recognition and the challenges of (misrecognition) that is informed by religious convictions, by a transnational remembrance of a historical narrative that informs their civic engagement, where they collectively aim to denounce their (mis)recognition, resist (re)victimization and generates a momentum for agency that inspires action. The stories offered by participants of this study in this context offer an alternative narrative of Muslim minority diasporas in Canada, particularly those who have experienced religious persecution in their home countries, whose histories are rooted in marginalization and victimhood; whose identities are constantly producing and reproducing in a migratory context (Ali, 2019) leaving us to ask the question of what meaning are they producing for themselves and others considering their insistence on civic participation?

What I have covered in earlier chapters and more specifically in the previous section, was this profound attachment to Hussein in Karbala, what he stood for and the significant impact on the current religio-political representation his message has had and continues to have within Shi'ism; the historical narrative of Hussein as pivotal historical moment that has shaped identity and its meaning in a transnational form. One of the challenges I faced as a researcher when I began to work on this topic of Shi'i diaspora in Canada, was the lack of research and literature in this particular field. The relation between religion and politics in the context of identity formation of the Shi'i diaspora has been absent in literature, even more so

within the Canadian context. Similar studies that explore this profound attachment to Karbala by Shi'i diaspora communities in various contexts have been conducted in Europe and the United States as well as Australia. In Europe, various studies have looked at a detailed exploration of the Shi'i diasporic cultural and religious identities in London, England (Ali, 2019), as well as the study of spaces of worship and the annual ritual procession and their use of signage of Shi'i Twelvers in Edinburgh, Scotland (Alibhai, 2018); others have examined the transnational identity of the Shi'i community as well as their ritual practice of remembrance in Norway (Bøe & Flakerud, 2017), and the examination of commemoration of Ashura and remembrance of Hussein in the context of migrant society in Sydney, Australia (Tabar, 2003); the performativity of Ahura mourning for Shi'i Muslim communities in Piraeus, Greece (Chatziprokopiou, Marios, Hatziporkopiou, 2017) as well as the religious rituals of the Iraqi Shi'i women and how Karbala is remembered in the diaspora, in addition to the Shi'i self-representation as a moderate group among Muslims in Ireland (Scharbrodt, 2011, 2018; Shanneik, 2015). Other studies have looked at the various challenges Shi'i Americans as minorities within minorities face in the United States (Liyakat Takim, 2018; Liyakatali Takim, 2009); as well as the diversity that exists within the Shi'i communities in Germany, in particular, in terms of their linguistic, national and ethnic background as well as their religious practice in an attempt to explore the concept of belonging of this Shi'i religious minority (Langer, Robert, Weineck, 2017). These studies highlight the need, now more than ever, to focus on these alternative Muslim narratives, their struggles and their lived experiences, particularly in light of the mass immigration and the intersection between religious and political ideology of the new world order. The studies referenced above in various European countries as well as United states and Australia also

highlight the very recent and sudden interest that has been given to these particular Muslim minority narratives, which is most likely attributed to the recent religio-political, sectarian tension that is taking place in the Middle East, in addition to the gap in literature when it comes to studying Shi'i Islam in particular. The stories shared by the participants can offer a small step in highlighting this gap in literature particularly as Canada continues to improve and work on the Multiculturalism policy in light of the influx of immigration and refugees in the recent years.

In exploring identity formation of this particular diaspora community and in an effort to shed light on the needs, aspiration of this marginalized minority within a minority my aim is to provide a glimpse on how minority groups particularly those who are members of religious institutions structure political engagement as little has been known about this specific issue (Jamal, 2005). In this section I aim to highlight, based on the stories shared by the participants, how they organize and think of themselves as participants in instances of civic engagement and community work in light of Islamophobia as well as anti-Shi'i sentiments within the larger Muslim community. I aim to shed light on what motivates agency for this particular diaspora community in BC, in light of their persistence and insistence on civic engagement. This Shi'i community has established what they refer to as “a humanitarian branch” of their community centre that focuses on civic-engagement⁵¹. I aim to answer the question of how religious membership for this particular community informs political engagement, which is founded on the basis of a historical narrative that not only serves as their motivation to act but it also informs their action as it relates to belonging. In

⁵¹ Within their humanitarian branch, they define their mission as such “[our]work is driven by a passionate and spiritual belief that the life of every human being is sacred and that we have a responsibility to help, protect and respect one another...[this humanitarian branch] aims to meet the humanitarian needs of our local and global communities to promote kindness, unity and peace in our world.”

this section I aim to highlight the various ways the participants of this study articulate their hope and vision for their quest for recognition and visibility as a minority within a minority community in Canada as a right that complement their ‘political spirituality’.

4.2.1 Shi’i Activism as a Spiritual Commitment

One dominant theme in the stories shared by the participants was the sense of a spiritual commitment they all shared. When they defined their sense of identity they would share with me the values that they hold dear, values that were imbedded in religious narratives that continue to inform their day to day life styles. Malika, who is a very active member of her community shared a story about the community farm that is part of their community centre. This community centre is located on an agricultural land, on a road that is home to approximately 20 religious institutions, a long road that is located in lower mainland. Each establishment that is built on this road, according to Malika, is required by law to use a portion of their agricultural land they are on to have a community farm as per City of Richmond’s initiative to foster and maintain agricultural viability in the city⁵². Malika shared with me that among all the establishments that are on that road they are among the only 2 communities that have taken serious action to actually abide by the regulation of having a community farm as per the city’s requirement. She told me about their community farm that has been producing blueberries and apples for quite some time. She said “[we]sell them to the community – and make a donation to the community-that happens because of our values and we were in the paper [for it]...we are doing it; it’s hard but our reputation is on the line”.

⁵² Detailed information about Agriculture in the City of Richmond, BC can be found here: <https://www.richmond.ca/plandev/planning2/agriculture/about.htm>

There are two particular references that are quite intriguing within this story that Malika shared with me. The first is the emphasis on the values that guide their actions that are deeply rooted in the spiritual teachings and motivate action and the other is how she associates this act with the ‘reputation’ of the community. Action here is once again, being referenced to the religious values that informs their everyday. The simple act of farming in itself was not the point Malika was trying to share with me. To Malika, reputation as she calls it, and self-presentation was of utmost important quality. She shared with me a personal story of how Canada is the only home she knows, the only one she truly cares for, to her, marginalization or misrecognition was nothing but an unfair and unjust treatment that she wanted to stand up to. She shared with me that those values were taught to her by her father whom she spoke very highly of “it was always important to him to give back and not be a burden –he used to say I will never go on welfare- I will never be on social assistance, he worked so hard to provide for us- those were his values- those are the values that I hold dear”. Reputation and self-representation to Malika are about the positive impact they can have as a community, the ways they have to give back because this is “my Canada as much as it is everyone else’s”. This story of the farm was followed by an emotionally charged sentiment about how she defined her Shi’i identity, she began the story about the farm and what the community is trying to do after she said “I want to show that I am Shi’i- and that you know what? We are good, and you don’t need to look down on us”. To Malika, the one response to marginalization was active community work and civic engagement in the case of Shi’i Muslims. That seemed to be the only possible solution.

Going back to Malika’s special emphasis on the example of the community farm is that low-key, subtle act of resistance and struggle to counter mis-recognition that Mary

Hegland tells us about. Highlighting the importance those simple acts carry and that “we must attend to these obscure and ambiguous forms of struggle” (Hegland, 2003, p. 429).

Malika spoke about the struggles she had faced in response to the marginalization that was imposed on their community. To Malika, being a Shi’i Muslim back home is quite different from being a Shi’i Muslim here in Canada. She was 5 years old when she moved to Canada. She told me:

My parents told me everyone was one community and it didn’t matter what community and sect you were from- and when moved here and we realized we are living among Christians and slowly our faith became more important to us so – because other people’s faith was important to them- so if we had to survive here [our faith] had to also become important to us.

Other participants also shared the same sentiment in their stories, that faith became more important to them within the migratory context. Malika recalled “we were the first Shi’i community here and slowly – it was hard because there was more racism than when we started and it was difficult” focusing specifically on her own and the community’s experiences with Islamophobia, specifically in the early 1980’s. Her focus quickly shifted to a new kind of marginalization as she recalled when their Shi’i community established its first community centre in BC. She began by telling me it was then that their community first began to notice “otherness”. Malika’s experiences of marginalization and misrecognition stems from their unwelcomed efforts as they attempted to build connection with other Muslim communities especially during religious community events. She recalled: “we would invite them and they wouldn’t come and they wouldn’t invite us to theirs – we wanted to do things together but they started to say things against us and we kept inviting them”. Malika

believes that current sectarian tension in the Middle East has also played a role in the relationships between Shi'i and Sunni Muslims in Canada.

4.2.2 (re) Defining Resistance through Political and Civic Participation

For this community, holding community events such as “Journey into Islam”⁵³ serves to clear misconception to the wider non-Muslim Canadians in light of Islamophobia but also to Sunni Muslims who might have been influenced by the anti-Shi'i rhetoric that has found its way within the Muslim communities in Canada. The purpose of the event is “so everyone who comes bring a non-Muslim with them – so they bring non-Muslim friends [...] it is beautiful, there are exhibits – they get a tour of the mosque – about 300 people show up!” Malika told me excitingly. She went on to tell me how most of the event is also youth led, where they organize tables with various themes to showcase what the community works on as a mean to connect with the wider non-Muslim community. Malika shared with me that their main concern continues to be the negative anti-Shi'i sentiments from the other Muslim communities, but she argues:

Now it depends on who their leaders are – it's worse now because they go out of their way to shun us to makes us feel we are not part of anything in common- our religion is that we are making things up- they hear stories from their own leaders but there is no effort to validate anything- come to our centre and ask us!...we sent invitations but many decide not to come- [I]feel angry because we live in a world where education is at your fingertips so how can you not follow something so timely – how can you follow something so blindly?

⁵³ A Journey into Islam is a yearly event organized by this community which aims to showcase exhibition and open house and as it is outlined on the community centre's website it is “designed to convey the core beliefs and practices of the Islamic faith in an interactive and comprehensible manner. The event aims to create a comfortable environment in which guests are welcome to ask questions and engage in dialogue with members of our community”.

This sense of misrecognition was what was frustrating to Malika. I could see that as she shared with me passionately the extent of the work she was involved in because her community matters so much to her. To Malika every community effort and engagement within their community centre was an effort to build a Shi'i identity that is recognized and respected in Canada- it was all about the Shi'i Canadian identity that deserved recognition. Malika tells me “when we are given an opportunity we take advantage of it [...] because it show[s] other members that we have a voice”.

Another important project under the humanitarian branch of their centre was “Project Backpack”⁵⁴ a community-based project, in partnership with Child Aid International, which aims to provide school supplies for BC’s children who live below the poverty line. Malika takes a special kind of pride in this particular project, she shared with me her experience working with a Vancouver East NDP MP to provide backpacks for Syrian refugee children as well as low-income Children in BC. Malika told me about how their community centre was chosen among one of the most organized community centres in lower mainland and that was mainly due to their dedication in “getting things done” when asked to help, “because we are so organized [...] we are effective and so proud, we are at that level and that other people are accepting of our existence”. Malika said she did mention to the MP about the marginalization that their community has been facing lately “even if we are ready to do this, other organizations are not willing to work with us [...] she didn’t know, she was shocked!”

This project and collaboration had a significant meaning to their community center, “we were recognized and we never ever get recognized and she[the MP] was shocked that

⁵⁴ Project Backpack mission statement reads: “[...] Child Aid International in partnership with [the humanitarian branch of the community centre] are working to provide backpacks for BC’s children who are living below the poverty line as well as for Syrian newcomers to Canada[...] Each backpack will include school supplies, a lunchbox, a water bottle and comfort items such as gloves or socks. It is the right of every child to feel loved and accepted[...]”.

they didn't know that others weren't willing to work with us- I mean it's sad – I feel like a kid in the school playground – you know when you need someone to come fight for you? Right? when you can't sort it out between yourselves – it's embarrassing - really". When Malika spoke of this sense of recognition, she acknowledged it as a sense of achievement, a win for her community. Malika went on to tell me in her opinion that connecting with politicians was one way of achieving recognition. One way she suggests is to be more politically involved with local government, she suggested a collaborative approach where "we are Shi'i Muslims and we want to work with you" could have the power to challenge the status quo as there are various Muslims organizations and communities. She shared with me that their community centre connects well with the local government and in fact there is a local MP that regularly visits their community centre: "He comes and visits us, he eats with us and sits with us- [and acknowledges the work we do]..."Malika shared with me that a part of their community work is distributing food in Downtown East-Side, the challenge however was to find other communities that wanted to work with them on this project. Malika spoke of her frustration where other Muslim communities refused to work with them on this project "we couldn't do it with other Islamic places but [with] schools of other faiths we could" She added "our community is also trying to connect with different communities and organizations that are not Muslims to work on[humanitarian] projects". Collective work with various other faith-based communities have been an effective approach in expanding their humanitarian community work, almost all of the participants in this study attributed this factor to the Canadian multicultural diversity that has allowed for such opportunities.

Perhaps, amongst the stories that my participants shared, the most challenging part was the distinction they wanted to highlight between their own struggles as a minority within

a minority group in terms of the anti-Shi'i sentiments they were facing along with the rampant Islamophobia which has impacted every Muslim, regardless of sectarian affiliation. Their multi-layered identities had created a condition where they had to tackle various forms of marginalization on their own. The way they tried to highlight this in their own stories was a poignant sentiment in itself. One of the participants, who wanted to highlight this very issue said to me "a proverb in East Africa says- when you see your friend is getting his head shaved, know that you are next" referencing that Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslims affects every Muslim community, even the minorities within. Highlighting the need to work collaboratively with others while also acknowledging that the onus remains on the Shi'i communities to clear misconceptions as they try to build positive relationships with other Muslim communities. This sentiment was apparent with all the participants. They highlighted the sense of responsibility that they had in building those relationships, regardless of the challenges they were facing.

One participant, Amin, provided an interesting observation regarding the political involvement of the community members and what factors usually influence their political decision making. He believes:

While we live here we do have a lot of baggage when we come here. Sometimes as a community our interest is what is happening around the world, instead of what is happening in our own backyards, we talk about the politics of the Middle East but very seldom we get involved in the politics in our own local community- we then become a single issue community, when election comes around, it's about foreign policy and that becomes a defining indicator [should we elect] a Conservative, a

Liberal or NDP. Because for us that is what politics is [referencing the Middle-East foreign policy].

Highlighting how for this diasporic community, the politics of ‘back-home’ influences the political climate here in Canada as well. He went on to also say:

“but slowly we are now learning how the schools are politics, the roads, whether pipelines are going through our lands, dealing with racism, the policies that happen here, we need to get involved in that – that is also changing as we develop our Canadian identities”. Amin also acknowledges that “unfortunately foreign issues are affecting local relationships”, referencing the sectarian politics in the Middle East and its impact on local Muslim communities, particularly in term of the Shi’i- Sunni relations.

To Amin, intra-faith dialogue was much more important than inter-faith dialogue when it comes to diaspora communities. Amin spoke of the discrimination and marginalization not only from the larger Muslim community but also the marginalization that Shi’i communities face from the government. The tense political relation between Iran and Canada has also had negative impact on the Shi’i communities in Canada⁵⁵. Many of the participants spoke about the marginalization that the Shi’i Muslim communities face solely because they are always seen in light of Iran and a proxy to Iran. In the words of one of the participants, Shi’i identity in Canada is seen by the government as “Carrying out the bidding of Iran and I know that CSIS⁵⁶ are always more sensitive over the students[who study religion] coming from Iran – they tell them we are watching you and aware of your actions

⁵⁵ Canada and Iran had a reciprocal diplomatic relationship until September 2012, “when Canada closed its embassy in Tehran and expelled Iranian diplomats from Ottawa”- more information available here: <https://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/iran/canada-iran/canada-iran.aspx?lang=eng>

⁵⁶ The Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

and what you say; that we are aware of what you say in your [religious sermons], foreign powers should not affect local policies –but CSIS does that”.

There was always a collective consensus on what actions participants wanted to see in response to such marginalization, as one participant puts it “[we want]our rights to be respected and to be given the same treatment as other communities are given – that our scholars are not be put under greater scrutiny – our wordings are not put under greater scrutiny for peoples’ political agendas than other communities”. The solution to that was according to many of the participants, only extra community effort to educate the public about these kinds of misconceptions.

Every one of the participants believed that it was their responsibility to act and change that perception. Zeina, who works in an educational setting told me that, in her opinion, being community driven and active participant in all forms of humanitarian work is the only way such perceptions can change:

This is the whole reason why we wanted to do [humanitarian projects]- I want us to be community driven and focus on that position and the good people we are – we are so accepting of others[...]I want to show we are inclusive and I feel we can by helping the greater community – we should give back because we live here- I think it is important to highlight who we are- we can’t be lumped in one.

Active participation in various social forms, for this particular community, serves not only the religious doctrine that they adhere to but it also serves as a source of reinforcement of their agency and positionality among other communities. It is extremely difficult to dissociate these two issues as they are interrelated. This was evident in every story the participants of this study shared. Although their community work was because of what they

believe is the Shi'i doctrine of helping others and standing for those who are less fortunate but at the same time, they have used this religious positionality as an identity marker within their diasporic spaces.

For Zeina, who is an educator, this sense of *being recognized* as she calls it, is only achievable when the members of Shi'i community themselves actively seek recognition by demanding and asserting their rights. This sentiment is congruent with the idea that in cases of minority groups, such as this Shi'i community, there are two options that are available when it comes to marginalization imposed by a majority, one is to accept the sense of marginalization as is or take on a more vocal role by seeking recognition and standing up to marginalization by claiming their rights as citizens (Cárdenas, 2019).

Zeina shared with me a story that happened to her as she was working during the time of commemoration of Ashura one day. She said she began to notice that the parents of the Shi'i students would call in to report their kids sick in order to take the day off, to attend the commemoration event. She said as she began to go through the list of the students missing for that day, she was able to tell the students whose surname indicated they were Shi'i and noticed that when parents called to notify the school administrators of the reasons why their children were absent they did so under the pretense of a sick leave. She noticed that only two of those students, had their parents called to indicate it was a religious observation date so their children could not be present. She used the example of parents of students who do contact school to notify school administration for instance when it is Rosh Hashana. So:

Why Ashura is [not]being recognized because when you recognize Rosh Hashana and other holidays [why can't we do the same]? Calling it a religious observation and not calling in sick – if only all those kids or their parents called in to say that was a

religious observance- maybe they were embarrassed not wanting to explain it? why? [for example]When it is your birthday – no one in the world knows but if you say it's your birthday everyone recognizes it-everyone wishes you [for example]on Facebook as soon as you put it everyone wishes you but [if you don't , no one will] I think it's the [responsibility]of the parents that they have to recognize that[...] we have to take it upon ourselves-we can't wait for the world to recognize it, [it is on us] to feel that we are recognized here , that we are here, this is what we are doing.

What is evident in the stories of the participants of this study is that experiences of marginalization shape and construct a special kind of resistance (Hall, 1997), one that is context specific, one that is low-key and subtle (Hegland, 2003). Each story shared by the participants was in its own way an act of resistance to the imposed marginality that they face as a minority. These obscure forms of struggle and resistance add such value to this study, that even for myself as a researcher and a Shi'i Muslim such acts, in all of their simplicity, were suddenly so powerful that I was simply intrigued by their impact. Their anger and frustration in what they were facing had in no way made them bitter or vengeful, but in fact, it had created the condition for them to connect with other marginalized communities, such as the homeless in Downtown East-Side or the refugees and new comers in assisting them with resettlement. The frustration with this sense of marginalization, particularly in response to unfair treatment, in fact leads to even stronger support and taking part in collective action (Klandermans, van der Toorn, & van Stekelenburg, 2008).

The participants' stories of their everyday lives and their response to marginalization can be seen here as a sense of empowerment, one that is rooted in collective action (Drury,

Cocking, Beale, Hanson, & Rapley, 2005) and community work. Leila, the youngest participant told me of her hopes for the future of their community centre:

I wish we were more involved in local charities- like with a church or more local issues- I know our mosque was involved in women march – [I want us to be] more well-known- we want to help out, we don't want to just help Shi'i Muslims – we want to help- like that Jewish synagogue that was targeted in Montreal a while ago and the Muslim community helped rebuild it. I want to do things like that [...] I definitely can do more- I want to see things on a bigger scale - I want to see people succeeding - may be in our eye it's small but in someone else's is well worth it - it's important for others to see it.

Her response is in direct relation to her quest for recognition, as one's action becomes a reflection of one's identity (Drury et al., 2005) as this sense of self-reasserting which is primarily based on the relationship one has with one's self in forms of self- confidence, self-respect and self-esteem (Renault, 2007).

For this particular community, the absence of resistance, which is embedded even in the smallest acts, such as the ones the participants of this study shared, is simply disempowerment (Drury et al., 2005). Active community work and collective action by almost all participants was an indication of empowerment of their marginalized identities. Another participant spoke of her hope for the future of the community by acknowledging the 'very organized work' that she was very proud of. Maysa shared with me that her hope is that the community can play a greater role as she believes there is "a lot of potential" in their community and collective work. She said "we can be very active out there, we were trying to build just ourselves but now we should be part of a larger *Umma*- I volunteer with a Muslim

food bank – this community started as a food bank [...] I am an active member!” Maysa said to me with excitement and pride in her own work. She shared with me that one of her duties was also a project called ‘connecting families program’ which was a community effort to connect newly arrived Syrian refugees with various communities in an effort to “reintegrate them into a Canadian society” as she puts it.

For Maysa, intra-faith dialogue is an important aspect. She believes the Shi’i-Sunni tension that exists within the Muslim communities is due to various unresolved misconceptions that could only be resolved thorough active community efforts. Maysa shared with me that to her the wellbeing of all Muslims, especially in Canada, in light of Islamophobia, is what is important to her:

When I think of a choice, I think more of a Muslim- I think we should work together- [there has to be] some things we could do – like for example- someone approached my husband – a Sunni brother approached and asked why can’t we pray together for Eid[...] my thinking is that let’s do things together, be more humanitarian -we need to reach out and we need open dialogue – We just need to focus on commonalities.

Maysa who is an educator primarily focused on what needs to be done next to co-exist peacefully ‘here’ despite the differences and the political tension in the Middle East that have a direct impact on relationships here in Canada.

That call for organizing communal events to join other Muslim communities, is in itself a form of re-assertion of their marginalized identities. This sentiment on collaboration was precisely from the same participant who spoke of her fear in disclosing her Shi’i identity in the private school she is currently working in. Fear and anger were in no way manifested in a negative way with the participants in this study, fear and anger, motivate and enforce

collective action to provide change to their everyday realities. This sentiment was also noted in the stories of the other participants. Another participant shared with me that she would like to work with other Muslim communities but also mentioned that not all their advances in this regard are welcomed by others:

We tried to work with BC Muslim schools but they were hesitant – they didn't want to – for instance we said let's play hockey or work on a science fair [as school projects amongst our schools], but there is hesitancy. We initiated some projects with them [but didn't hear back] – I haven't done it actively now [recently]– I am not sure what the response has been now.

Efforts to engage in an intra-faith dialogue is currently ongoing as the community centre continues to initiate community events with various Muslims communities, such efforts have been successful in a few cases as participants shared with me. Maysa shared with me that a while back she initiated a committee for an event which was about the active role of Muslim women in their communities and that effort was welcomed and other women from various Muslim communities joined that event, “we all got together- then it was nice”. The recurring theme of togetherness was also evident in the stories shared by them. In this context, togetherness was motivated by the shared sense of being ‘just Muslims’ together, particularly in light of anti-Muslim sentiments.

This sense of togetherness is important to highlight as it is context-dependent. The importance of togetherness or the forming strong coalition with other marginalized group has been and continues to be an important philosophy for the participants in this study as they see victimization and marginalization as a form of injustice that needs to be addressed and resisted whenever possible. Meanwhile there is also another important sense of togetherness

that becomes important in light of Islamophobia, where the sectarian distinction becomes less important. This community continues to challenge, resist marginalization and victimization in all of its forms through their active community work and collaborations with others. Equitable participation for this community is about self-reassertion, about not allowing marginalization to have a chance at dictating how they should lead their lives, it is particularly important to them in light of the marginalization and systemic victimization that they had experienced in their home countries as the result of religious persecution. They see Canada as their new home, the one that promises, *'every individual should have an equal opportunity with other individuals to make the life that the individual is able and wishes to have'*, but they also recognize that the onus is on them to ensure those 'equal opportunities' are respected, recognized and applied, as those are not easily given out to everyone.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Past, Present and the future

“If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it.” - Toni Morrison

In exploring the connection between victimhood, identity and resistance, I have demonstrated that acts of resistance, no matter how small and subtle, when motivated by religious convictions - as is the case with the participants in this study - can have the potential to create religio-political identities that transform the narrative of victimhood and insist on active citizenship. In the case of the participants in this study, their insistence on active community work and social cooperation, alongside other marginalized communities, is their way to reject (re)victimization and marginalization as they seek equal recognition and equal participation as a minority within a minority in Canada. I have argued that victimhood, in the case of this Shi'i Muslim community in BC has created a form of resistance to injustice and misrecognition and a tool for change. In exploring the meaning of victimhood, I have framed its meaning through religious narratives as well as texts from the scholarly literature but then relied at the center of my thesis on the narratives of the participants of this study to articulate its meaning in relation to their lived experiences, as victimhood is articulated in personal expressions in relation to ones' social interactions and experiences.

In this dissertation, I have advanced the argument that self-understanding for Shi'i Muslims, particularly the participants in this study, is grounded in a particular religious narrative of Hussein in Karbala, a historical story that although is steeped in victimization, has served as a transnational mobilizing force, that has been a source of inspiration for their personal and community transformation. Insistence on remembering the historical narrative of Hussein, its representation, perception and symbolism creates a capacity for agency where

remembrance is political and victimhood a motivating force. In this study, I shed light on this aspect of the Shi'i identity in the diaspora, as I argue that amidst the mourning and the remembrance of the story of Hussein, agency and resistance take shape, sometimes in the most subtle forms; in their everyday.

In the introduction of this dissertation, I started by sharing a story of my childhood experiences as a young Shi'i Muslim and what that meant and how it has shaped my sense of identity. I went back to my childhood because the questions of who I am and what it means to be a Shi'i Muslim have always been important to me with a genuine curiosity. I have shared Toni Morrison's quote here at the beginning of this chapter because that statement perfectly encapsulates what I wanted this dissertation to be. I wanted to learn more about my own multi-layered identity, about the relation between victimhood and agency, the terms I grew up with; remembrance and action and resistance, the words I heard year after year; as well as the relation between identity and action and the intersection between victimhood, marginalization and agency and above all how suffering could be used as a coping and transformative measure of resistance. These particular concepts have always been articulated as pertinent within the Shi'i discourses that attempt to define Shi'i identity. I deployed insights from political theory to frame the dissertation including Arendt, Brown and Das on agency and participation in light of victimhood, Benhabib on culture and narrative, Young on victimhood and oppression, Hall on new ethnicities, Eisenberg on minorities within minorities, Kymlicka on multiculturalism and Taylor on dialogical multiculturalism as well as recognition and misrecognition within those processes. Narrative method was informed and framed through narrative inquiry through Clandinin and Connelly's work on understanding personal experiences as lived and told stories along with Leavy's work on

arts- based research as a research method that allows for emergence of personal experiences that other traditional methods cannot capture. I have also relied on the work of Bochner and Riggs as they illuminate the unique power of narrative inquiry that has humanized human science by placing the personal identity at the center. The interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation has allowed me to explore these concepts within the Canadian context in relation to the participants in this study. In this chapter I aim to unpack these concepts accordingly.

5.1 How and Why a Story is Told

The central importance of narrative throughout this dissertation has been evident both as an essential component within the Shi'i Muslim tradition as well as a method of inquiry that was used to connect with members of this particular community. Narratives for this particular community, specifically the historical narrative of Hussein in Karbala serves as a powerful source of religious inspiration that motivates their everyday, one that is meant to show a path of action for the future. For this community, the past, present and the future are all interconnected within their stories, aiming to remind the reader how and why a story is told; as a medium that allows and creates a space for recognition. As personal experiences were weaved in with the historical religious narratives, ones that have shaped a distinct Shi'i identity, that is imbedded in remembrance while motivating action and agency.

The participants in this study, construct their sense of identity and what it means to be Shi'i Muslims in Canada in form of a narrative; the ways they have become and where they are going; as identity is shaped as such (Taylor, 1994). In that articulation of identity, they have found the story of Hussein in Karbala as the “how we have become”, referencing Hussein and also highlighting how that journey of becoming, has not been devoid of challenges as they cite marginalization and victimhood, that they have faced both in the face

of Islamophobia generally and anti-Shi'i sentiments more specifically in Canada. The story of Karbala has been the source of mobilization for this community, one that shows them "where we are going". As they (re) contextualize the narratives of marginalization and victimhood (Das, 2001) through the sense of solidarity with other marginalized groups (de Waardt, 2016) inspired by historical narrative of Hussein in Karbala. They have also used that same narrative as a path of action, not only so everyday life becomes possible but also as inspiration as well as a source of mobilization as a community of minority within minority, among others in Canada.

The stories of marginalization and victimhood as framed in the scholarly literature (Young, 1988; Benhabib, 1990) but as shared by the participants of this study are important, unique and offer a new contribution to minorities scholarship and the Shi'i Muslims ways of knowing in Canada. The participants of this study shared with me the burden they carry in their everyday; the burden of untold stories that they carry with them as they continue to experience misrecognition. For instance, the story that Maysa shared in the previous chapter as she spoke about how she continues to conceal her Shi'i identity at the private school she teaches at because she is afraid that she could lose her job if she discloses her identity. For others who spoke of fear, misrecognition and instances of marginalization based on their faith. Their stories raise the question of what are the moral obligations that we have now that we are aware of this sense of marginalization that is affecting those who live among us?

What comes next as a moral responsibility for us as readers?

In exploring the dilemma of identity and voice construction of this Shi'i community in BC, I argue that their stories, their personal expression of victimhood and their articulation of identity formation as a minority within a minority (Eisenberg & Spinner-Halev, 2005) could

be a significant contribution for the purpose of advancing multiculturalism rights in Canada. Their stories, their articulation of their own self-understanding, as a faith-based community, contribute and guide us to understand multiculturalism as it evolves, as Kymlicka (1995) suggests through dialogical means (Taylor, 1994). Kymlicka suggests that in order to fully grasp and accommodate the needs of minorities, particularly religious minorities, so they can lead the kinds of lives they choose, a thorough case-by-case examination is needed (Kymlicka, 2015). These stories could be a significant contribution as multiculturalism policy in Canada continues to evolve. These stories have the potential to direct us to certain themes that are currently underexplored both within literature and within our communities, such as the recurring theme of victimhood (Brown, 1995) in the face of oppression (Young, 1988) in the stories of the participants, which would have gone unnoticed otherwise. Their stories offer new alternative narratives as we continue to explore the meaning of diversity and multiculturalism in Canada. Their personal expressions of self demonstrate a unique perspective of what minorities within minorities face in their everyday in Canada.

Victimhood in the stories presented above were constitutive of their self-understanding with the exception that for this particular community, it had also contributed to the production of a moral code, where (re)victimization is to be resisted and that inspiration was imbedded in a political spirituality that I will discuss next.

5.2 The Shi'i- Muslim-Canadian (re)Articulation of Victimhood

In the second chapter of this dissertation, I aimed to explore the complexities that surround victimhood, its multiple definitions in various fields of study, its complexities and its social and political construction and the meaning that are ascribed to it by those who are

labeled as victims. I have argued in this dissertation that victimhood is a political construct (Ronsbo & Jensen, 2014) but how it's defined and what meaning is attributed to it is solely based on personal expressions, because defining victimhood and its significance is always context dependent (D. Clarke, 2019). In this dissertation my goal was to explore victimhood in relation to the lived experiences of the participants of this study, I did not attempt to define it as its definition and its meaning only emerges in social and political interactions through the personal expressions of those who experience its impact in their everyday life.

Victimhood, just as narratives, was central to this study, particularly as it was defined by those who had experienced the burden of marginalization first hand. In this study and within the stories of the participants, victimhood was defined in relation to historical religious narratives, its definition and social and political significance was always in relation to historical contexts. In case of this particular community, victimhood was never a fixed position that deprived them of agency. As I have argued in the previous chapters, the participants of this study have agency, they possess a political will and they actively give meaning to victimhood through remembrance; there is a particular religious resistance to victim categorization where they have given it meaning within the social structure (Hoondert et al., 2018).

In their stories, both insistence and resistance to their marginal status was in the shape of active community work. In their continuous remembrance of the narrative of Hussein that is deeply rooted in suffering and victimhood, they have found resistance and continuous community work and engagement with other marginalized communities as a coping mechanism to destabilize that state of victimhood from a fixed position to one that is actively seeking recognition and resisting (re)marginalization. Victimhood in their case, has produced

a moral-code, one that detest marginalization and begets action instead. I echo, Veena Das's argument where she writes how the experiences of subjugation, when owned and worked upon can become a source of claiming a subject position (Das & Kleinman, 2001). What I am suggesting by 'owning and working upon' in this case is that instead of expressing a fixed identity that is rooted in a passive victim position of 'I am a victim', a transformative motivation of resistance, imbedded in the religious narrative of Hussein in Karbala emerges, and shifts that stand to 'I want this for us politics' which is what Wendy Brown argues in *States of Injury*. Shifting their positionality from the first person singular pronoun, the "I" to the claiming of a plural "us" as they form a collective identity. For instance, in chapter 4, Zeina shares the story of the importance of claiming and recognizing one's religious holidays in order to carve a space of recognition among others. Insisting on the importance of expressions of selves and identity and the transformative potential it could have in the everyday life. This was also demonstrated in the stories of the participants, as they spoke of their active community work, especially along with other marginalized communities.

In the narratives of the participants in this study, this idea of shifting away from passive victim status and seeking recognition was articulated through their active work with other marginalized groups that they have joined or worked with them on various community-based events. Shifting their positionality from the first-person singular pronoun, the "I" to the claiming of a plural "us" to a new transformative force of "we". Meaning all those who have been marginalized against; and in that they cite the religious moral responsibility that they adhere to within Shi'ism, where marginalization, which is a form of oppression (Young, 2014), must be resisted in all of its forms. The sense of marginalization that they had faced, was evident in all of their stories, transnational, regardless of where they were. They shared

that sense of pain of marginalization with other communities, it was a sense of solidarity that had found itself in the pain of politics, with other marginalized communities around them, as marginalization had become a unifying force that united them together. Within their stories, there was always an indication of ‘here’ and ‘there’, referencing their home countries as they spoke of what victimhood really meant to them. Identifying, the differences between the sense of victimhood ‘here’ and the sense of victimhood ‘there’ but acknowledging both as oppressive in their own ways.

The pain in politics and marginalization was almost always associated with a threat to safety and life once discussed in the context of ‘there’ sometimes as a state-sponsored and sometimes as rampant acts of violence that targeted them for being Shi’i Muslims. In the articulation of that sense of victimhood, the story of Hussein and his scarifies for the greater good was referenced. In the sense of victimhood ‘here’, it was that of deprivation of equal rights and opportunities to belong. It was articulated in the deprivation of cooperation and denial of equal rights. The difference, here is that they could use their status as Canadian citizens and carve up a space that allowed for cooperation as Canadians, not as Shi’is. When Malika spoke of her active role in Project Backpack that she was so proud of, her eyes lit up as she told me “we are effective and we are proud ...and others are accepting of our existence”. In their stories victimhood and marginalization served as motivators to act, as a ‘path of action’, one that forced them to go beyond what was imposed on them, to posit themselves as equal citizens. In their stories, Hussein stood-up to injustice and oppression, so this sense of marginalization ‘here’ is an unjust deprivation that has to be resisted by claiming their positions as equal Canadian citizens first and foremost before asserting their Shi’i identities. This sense of victimhood and marginalization was resisted through active

community work, through collaboration with other communities and lending a hand to marginalized communities in need, because they understand that civic engagement is the only response to the marginalization they face which is rooted in the deeply held religious belief that *“Oppression/ humiliation is not an option”*. The articulation of personal expression of victimhood allowed for the emergence of a creative and nuanced way to understand this complex concept, in ways that made sense to the participants themselves as they weaved the story of Karbala in their everyday to create new and transformative meaning to victimization.

5.3 Shi’i- Muslim-Canadian Identity: Seeking Representation Through Activism

A significant challenge for the participants during the interviews was their attempt at articulating their Shi’i Muslim Canadian identities while grappling thorough the challenging social categories of ‘otherness’ and ‘belonging’. As otherness and belonging are each of two-folds in this particular context. Otherness in light of Islamophobia where ‘otherness of Muslim communities’ is widespread, intersected with ‘otherness’ in light of anti-Shi’i sentiments by the wider Muslim community. This latter sense of otherness was a product of both, a transnational religio-political development in the Middle-East as well as centuries long religious sectarian divide that has found its way here in Canada and the rest of the world where Shi’i and Sunni Muslims have migrated. On the other hand, the sense of ‘belonging’; the notion of being equal citizens, as promised by the multicultural policy of Canada, with equal rights as other communities recognized under the law as Canadians, with equal recognition. Belonging, just as the ‘sense of otherness’ was of two-folds for the participants of this study. A sense of belonging to Canada as Canadian citizens with equal rights and responsibilities and sense of belonging to the larger ‘Muslim community’, the one that is

widely recognized. Articulating and expressing their sense of identity in light of otherness and belonging was always a challenge. The challenge was evident as they attempted to articulate their sense of ‘Shi’i-ness’ and ‘Muslim-ness’ interchangeably and when to prioritize one over the other. Where Muslim-ness had to be prioritized in light of Islamophobia and Shi’i-ness had to be prioritized in light of anti-Shi’i sentiments by the wider Muslim community, even within their stories, but in both situations resisting Islamophobia and anti-Shi’i sentiments were deeply imbedded in the religious narrative of Hussein that shapes and informs their activism.

Within the Shi’i religious thought, Hussein represents a universal framework that represents justice and equality for all, with a special emphasis on minority rights as a prioritized form of activism that they continuously engage in, not only for themselves but for other marginalized groups and those in need. The stories that the participants shared focused on the continuous attempts to promote a positive Muslim identity image, one without causing a discord within the wider Muslim community, yet at the same time resisting marginalization and being sidelined by the larger Muslim community. Their stories in this study illustrated that a Shi’i-Muslim-Canadian identity is inevitably caught in a multi-layered and complex positioning where they must create a self-representation that is equally invested, bold, and active in each intersection so it could not be ignored or marginalized; so they could belong and resist all the attempts that forces their marginalization. The participants spoke of being active Canadians, active Shi’is and active Muslims within their stories, so they could hold together and seek recognition of their Shi’i- Muslim- Canadian identity as whole. In the stories of Malika and Zeina we read about the subtle acts that they seek recognition for, as Shi’is, whether the necessity of recognizing Ashura as a religious holiday so kids can take the

day off as a religious observance, to the actively seeking to participate in various community work because of the strongly held belief that “we are here and we exist” was repeated in their stories multiple times.

In demanding or seeking recognition, the narrators in this study enact agency (Das, 2001) within their stories, with a commitment and insistence on equal recognition. In their stories, they speak of ‘going the extra mile’ because they need to do more for their community to increase their visibility, even when others around them engage in an attitude of misrecognition towards them, both as Shi’i Muslims in light of anti-Shi’i sentiments and Islamophobia in general. In this process of insisting on being active members within their community and resisting marginalization through active community work they are, in a way, effectively empowering themselves and in that process they become actors – these narrators are agents, their stories that contain the challenges they have faced in their everyday lives in Canada deserve recognition and acknowledgement. The politics of recognition rests on the notion that each human deserve respect (Horwitz, 2018; Taylor, 1994). As Charles Taylor suggests, our identities are constituted by recognition, particularly as we interact with others. The pursuit of equal dignity and equal rights and treatments demands acceptance by others around us. This particular community demands recognition through their social interactions and as such empower themselves, no matter how impartially, to manifest a future they strive for, one that is devoid of marginalization and (re)victimization.

The motivation to seek such self-representation was always imbedded in the historical narrative of Hussein, to never yield to those conditions that seek to marginalize them, just as Hussein did. Perhaps the most touching story shared with me was Malika’s. The passion and sadness in her voice as she told me about the pain, embarrassment and frustration that she

faced as a Shi'i, as a Muslim and as a Canadian as she told me about her “fight to be included”, a quote that I shared at the beginning of chapter two. I still remember her frustration and heartbreak as she said those lines to me and I also remember her eagerness to never give up because as she put it “this is my community as much as it is anybody else's”. For Malika, just as others, this sense of marginalization and frustration has become a force that motivates them to do more, not only for themselves but for all those who are sidelined and marginalized in the wider society; to that end, sense of marginalization and suffering has become the transformative measure of resistance.

Just as Malika, all of the other participants, attributed their motivation to seek recognition in the message of Hussein. This remembrance has shaped and continues to motivate resistance and a ‘path of action’ one that does not give up no matter the challenges and no matter the barriers. The subtle acts of activism and agency that this study has explored based on the stories of the participants, not only showcase the astonishing power of remembrance in motivating action but also seeking recognition for their social positioning as Shi'i- Muslim-Canadians through active community engagement.

5.4 Limitations and Future Direction

Shi'ism in Canada remains a neglected area of study. To this day, there are no accurate figures regarding the number of Shi'i Muslim Canadians, indicating a lack in recognition of the diversity that exist within Muslims in Canada; as the assumption is Islam in Canada is a monolithic entity. This assumption is dangerous as it deprives other marginal communities of their right to be included in the public discourse. Perhaps, this could be the first step in acknowledging and recognizing the existence of marginalized and minority

groups in Canada. Lack of accurate figure of the Shi'i-Muslim- Canadians was a recurrent theme in the stories of the participants, one that needs further inquiry.

Although I have worked with the narratives of nine participants only, their stories have offered rich insights into their lived experiences, where they have shared important insights into social, historical and political structures. The in-depth nature of the interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. I acknowledge and recognize the depth of their stories, and the deep meanings associated with them. I also recognize the impact of their stories and what it meant for them to share the most intricate details of their everyday with me as a researcher. There is a dire need to further study minorities within minorities in Canada, particularly those who have faced and continue to face challenges in their everyday lives as they seek equal recognition and equal citizenship. Having witnessed the activism of these participants as they claim a space for their Shi'i-Muslim-Canadian identity, I am optimistic, their efforts will shed light on their resilience and it will open the door for future research and recognition.

While I noticed the gap in literature on Shi'i Muslim Canadians, I was intrigued by the emerging literature on Shi'i Islam that is notable in Europe and America, although it remains mainly focused on rituals, migratory spaces without much emphasis on the civic engagement that this minority group engages with in their respective communities that they reside in. Examining the forms, this Twelver Shi'i diasporic community engages in civic activism, particularly in Canada where Muslim identity continues to be questioned and problematized needs further exploration as it can contribute to the area of minority studies in light of multiculturalism and immigratory context. Further exploration of activism within minority groups in Canada can provide insights into how such communities organize and think of

themselves which is a valuable addition to the liberal discourses of equality, human rights and minority representation that Canada's multiculturalism policy promises to promote. Despite these possible limitations and possibilities for future research, in this dissertation I have contributed to our understanding of the challenges that minorities within minorities, particularly the participants in this study are facing. Their personal stories of their lived experiences provide an additional perspective of what the everyday looks like for Shi'i Muslims in Canada. Their stories have contributed to the (re)interpretation of victimhood and resistance through narrative and community work.

5.5 Final Words

Every deed and every new beginning falls into an already existing web, where it nevertheless somehow starts a new process that will affect many others even beyond those with whom the agent comes into direct contact...The smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the same boundlessness and unpredictability; one deed, one gesture, one word may suffice to change every constellation. In acting, in contradistinction to working, it is indeed true that we can really never know what we are doing.- Hannah Arendt 'The Human Condition'

My Master's thesis was on developing framework for de-escalating sectarian tension between Shi'i Muslim and Sunni Muslims based on religious leaders' engagement. I conducted my interviews with prominent religious leaders in 2011 during a heightened sectarian tension in Baghdad and Beirut. During my stay there, I often wondered about what can a thesis of a young researcher do in the face of such complexities? What significant contribution will it have, not idealistically but realistically? In those moments of doubt I always found solace in the words of a mentor, a professor in Ottawa, who had dedicated his

life to peacekeeping missions, he reminded me, constantly, to never underestimate the power of ‘simple first steps’; these words never left me. He used to say even if one person reads it and it changes their minds and perception of the ‘other’ I should consider that an immense success. I now think he was right, all along. I reminded myself of his words throughout my dissertation work. I thought of him often as I read Hannah Arendt’s words that I shared above, as she tells us about the power of “*the smallest act in the most limited circumstances*”.

Years later and I’ve found a new and a deep appreciation for the small acts, the subtle ones that act as modes of agency and resistance. The ones that participants in this study shared with me as they wanted to do their part as Muslims, as Shi’is and as Canadians. I am reminded of their unwillingness to give up their attempt to lend a hand to those in need even when they were denied an opportunity to help. I am reminded of their resilience in never giving up, in the ways they organized and thought of themselves. Their refusal and resistance to (re)victimization through subtle acts of resistance and agency in their simplest forms as shared by their own stories. As I got to know them and their activism within their own community and others they had engaged with, I wanted to share their stories, to give them a platform to share their own voices. In my moments of doubts, I reminded myself of the power of the ‘simple first steps’, hoping that this dissertation could at least start the conversation about the place of the Shi’i-Muslims in Canada.

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