BEYOND MEN TO SURVEIL AND WOMEN TO (UN)VEIL: MUSLIM YOUTH NEGOTIATING IDENTITY, HOME AND BELONGING IN A CANADIAN HIGH SCHOOL

by

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

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Abstract

Muslims are living a precarious existence in Canada and the discomfort with Islam and Muslims is deeply entrenched in the Canadian psyche, policies, media and school curriculum. This research study explores Muslim youth identity negotiations and sense of belonging at this time of fear and uncertainty and disturbing racism and Islamophobia. It challenges the Muslim “single story”, questions being Muslim and becoming Canadian and explores the role of schools in youth identity negotiations and belonging using ethnographic methods and visual participatory methods.

The study was conducted in a Canadian public high school with young Muslim women and men aged 14 to 19, to investigate how Muslim youth from diverse ethnic, cultural, and national backgrounds and with different experiences of (im)migration and displacement construct and perform their Muslimness and/or Canadianness while they are navigating their daily school experiences.

The study is framed theoretically by critical theory, transnational feminism, postcolonialism, and notions of diaspora and critical identity and belonging. The different chapters center the experiences and voices of Muslims in Canada and highlight the multiple ways that they construct and perform “Muslimness”, negotiate “Canadianness” and manage the fluid and shifting “in-betweenness” that characterizes their “glocal” lives.

This dissertation delves into investigating the intricacies of Muslim youth identities and belonging and also the research dilemmas emerging from the research journey. It presents the complexities of these experiences; the centrality of race and religious visibility in defining how these young women and men feel about being Muslim and/or Canadian, and the situated ways
they engage with their Muslim and/or Canadian identities, their situated belonging and the different “worlds” they are inhabiting and their ways of making sense of them. The study findings highlight that there is a shift from the essentialized self-understanding and self-representation of Muslim identity shaped by transnational belonging, global youth culture and new forms of identification and engagement with religion, culture and belonging that go beyond the assumptions of authentic Muslim identity and the territoriality of belonging. It also identifies the impact of positive school experiences on these negotiations and the participants’ sense of belonging.
Lay Summary

This dissertation contributes to the empirical studies conducted in Canada to explore how Muslim high schoolers identify themselves, reflect on their religious identity and how they feel about belonging and unbelonging to Multicultural Canada. Ethnographic methods and visual participatory methods were used to conduct the exploration in a high school setting in a Canadian city. Findings show the complexities of these experiences, the centrality of race in defining how these young women and men feel about being Muslim and becoming Canadian, the fluidity of the “Muslim” identity as there is a shift from the essentialized self-understanding and self-representation influenced by global youth culture that is offering new forms of identification and engagement with religion, nation states and cultures. The study also identifies the impact of school leadership on the process of identity negotiations among youth.
This dissertation is composed of original work by the author. In addition to the introduction and the final conclusion, this volume comprises four chapters consisting of previously published journal articles and a book chapter.

Chapter 2 is a co-authored book chapter (Miled & Andreotti, 2015) entitled “Seeking home beyond borders: Incomplete stories”; it was published in an edited volume (Cristaldi, 2015). I am the lead author in this chapter, being responsible for 65% of the work: in charge of the outline, discussion of identity and multiculturalism frameworks, presenting my narrative, finalizing the chapter and following up with the volume editor. Dr. Andreotti worked on Paulston’s methodology, enriched the literature review and presented her narrative.

Chapter 3 was published online in 2017 as “Muslim researcher researching Muslim youth: Reflexive notes on critical ethnography, positionality and representation” in *Ethnography and Education Journal* (Miled, 2019).

Chapter 4 is a revised manuscript entitled “Beyond men to surveil and women to (Un)veil: Muslim high schoolers negotiating their “in-betweenness”, “Muslimness” and/or “Canadianness”, and it will be resubmitted for publication.

Chapter 5 is published as “Can the displaced speak? Muslim refugee girls negotiating identity, home and belonging through Photovoice” in *Women’s Studies International Forum Journal* (Miled, 2020)

I have made slight modifications to the texts and changed the titles of the chapters to ensure smoother incorporation into the dissertation.
All research enclosed in this dissertation was approved by the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Certificate Number: H16-02539).
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Dedication

In Loving memory of my mother Zakiya, my grandmother Khadija and all the strong, caring and loving women who have inspired me to pursue my dream. May Allah bless their souls.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

My research explores Muslim youth at a time of fear and uncertainty. These young people have witnessed, before they reach their twenties, 9/11, the global war on terror, the Islamic State (ISIS) atrocities, sweeping social movements like the Arab Spring (Dabashi, 2012), which have changed the geopolitical landscapes in the MENA region, mass migration movements, neo-Nazism and hate crimes which have targeted Muslims in many countries, such as the USA, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, Myanmar, China and India.

During these turbulent times, Muslim youth in Canada are negotiating their identities while trapped in entangled webs of the local and the global “discomfort”; being young and Muslim is considered “a problem” (Bayoumi, 2008) and “problematic” (Miah, 2016).

In this this 20-month ethnographic study, I have explored Muslim youth identity negotiations and their sense of (un)belonging to Canada as they navigate their daily lives in a Canadian high school. The questions that are guiding this inquiry are:

1. How do Muslim youth negotiate their identities as Muslims and/or Canadians?
2. How do they perceive their sense of belonging or unbelonging to Canada?
3. How do their school experiences (socialization, school culture and school leadership) inform the process of their identity negotiations and impact their sense of (un) belonging?

I have conducted this inquiry to emphasize that Muslim youth are navigating their lives and negotiating their identities within very complex and contested terrains.

Although they are part of a global generation, the fateful events surrounding the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, longer standing geopolitical conflicts in the Muslim Middle East, Asia, and Africa, debates and policy changes in Europe and North America with relation to Islam,
integration, and multiculturalism - combined with situations of marginality and crises of livelihood for Muslim youth throughout the South and North - have set apart Muslim youth in some significant ways as a generational subset. (Bayet & Herrera, 2010, p. 10)

However, it is extremely important here to emphasize that long before 9/11, Muslims were already living a precarious existence in Canada and the discomfort with Islam and Muslims was deeply entrenched in the Canadian psyche. Shahnaz Khan (1993) stated several years before 9/11 “that Islam is denigrated in Canadian society is evidenced by stereotypical images of Muslims in the media and texts. This denigration leads to an invalidation of Islam and the marginalization of Muslims” (p. 52). It is therefore necessary to historicize Muslims in Canada and unpack the different contexts that contour their lives.

1.1 Contextualizing the dissertation

1.1.1 Muslims in Canada: Demographics

In this section I present the profile of Muslims in Canada as it is important to understand who Muslims in Canada are, where they come from and why I focus particularly on youth. The story of Muslims’ arrival in North America and Canada dates back to the early days of European settlements, but most of this immigration is recent; over 60% of Muslims in Canada are foreign-born and have immigrated in the last twenty years. It is important to emphasize that the flow of Muslim immigrants was impacted by the growing political instability and wars that have torn several countries apart (Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Somalia, and Bosnia). According to Canada's 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), there were close to 1,054,000 Muslims in Canada or about 3.2% of the population, making them the second largest religion after Christianity. Even though most Canadian Muslims are foreign-born, there is a growing
percentage born in Canada. Muslims in Canada constitute the fastest growing population (Statistics Canada, 2016). In a report published by the Canadian Dawn Foundation Canadian Muslims: A statistical review (2015), there is evidence that “demographic transformation is underway. Canadian-born Muslims made up 22% of the Muslim population in 1991. In the next ten years, this proportion increased slowly to 24% but jumped to 28% in 2011” (Hamdani, 2015). This shift is very important, as the percentage of Canadian-born school-aged Muslim students is constantly on the rise. The National Household Survey (2011), stated that there were about 1,065 Muslims with an Aboriginal identity. Two-thirds belonged to the First Nations, while the remaining one-third (355) were Metis. There are also presumably a higher number of Muslims claiming Aboriginal Ancestry (Dawn Foundation, 2015) and a growing number of converts to Islam.

The majority of Canadian Muslims live in the province of Ontario; most have settled in the Greater Toronto Area. There are also significant Muslim populations in the provinces of Alberta, Quebec and British Colombia. Canadian Muslims are younger on average than other Canadians. The median age of Muslims in Canada is 28.1 years, compared to the overall Canadian population average age of 37 years (Janhevich & Ibrahim, 2004). Moreover, Canadian Muslims are diverse; they speak different languages and follow different religious traditions (Nimer, 2002; Haddad, 2004). They also come from different ethnic backgrounds: 37% are of South Asian heritage, 21% of Arab descent, 14% from the Caribbean and 28% from other ethnicities such as African, Chinese, Turkish, Bosnian, Afghan, Persian, Indonesian (Hanniman, 2008). The Muslim population is mostly composed of immigrants who came to Canada from various countries, including parts of the Arab World (Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria), Iran, Pakistan, India, Africa, Eastern Europe, the Caribbean, and South and
Central America (Nagra, 2011). It is important to highlight that recent statistics show that the role of immigration is declining because of the regulations restricting the immigration of Muslims, as “the post-11 September era restored the traditional discriminatory practice of dividing immigrants into preferred and non-preferred groups based on country of origin” (Kruger et al., 2004, p. 86).

Census figures indicate that Muslims are well educated; among those 15 years of age and older, 56% of Muslims had some form of post-secondary education, compared to 44% of the total population (Janhevich & Ibrahim, 2004). However, a higher educational level does not correspond to higher income; there are more Muslims in the lower income bracket (earning $30,000.00 or less per year) than any other religious group: “Muslims quite clearly earn less for their level of education” (Beyer, 2005, p. 194). Muslims also have the highest unemployment rate: “Some 13.9 per cent of Muslims were unemployed in 2011, as compared with the national average of 7.8 per cent” (Canadian Dawn Foundation, 2012). Although Muslims are generally associated with the Middle East and Arab countries, “no Arab country ranks among the three top source countries of Muslims population, by birth” (Dawn Foundation, 2015, p. 12).

The above demographic data serves to highlight the “transnational” dimension in the lives of Muslims in Canada and also underscores that the process of engaging with a “Muslim” identity is far from being identical among Muslim youth in Canada. In fact, Rahnema (2006) explains that “Muslims in Canada more or less reflect the global profile of Muslims, and thus form a heterogeneous population highly diversified in terms of ethnic, national and sectarian affiliations, and degrees of religious conviction” (p. 24). Despite the heterogeneity of Muslims in Canada, they are still portrayed and talked about as a homogenous group with a fixed and static cultural and religious affiliation.
1.1.2 Framing Muslims in Canada: Orientalism, terrorism, multiculturalism and racialization.

Muslims are currently living in very particular historical, geopolitical, and cultural local and global contexts characterized by disturbing anti-Muslim racism. Muslims are not only “caught up in the ever-expanding loop of xeno-racism” (Fekete, 2004, p. 4), that is evident in the increasing number of hate crimes against Muslims, the virulent media and political discourses and policies that stigmatize Muslims and dehumanize them, and the economic marginalization (Bakht, 2008; Kazemipur, 2014; Moghissi et al., 2009), but Muslims continue to be “cast out” in Sherene Razack’s (2008) expression because they are part of the “communities without the right to have rights” (p. 7). This eviction of Muslims according to Razack (2008) goes beyond discrimination, as Muslims are part of groups that “are constituted as a different order of humanity altogether by virtue of having no political community willing to guarantee their rights...Indeed their very expulsion from political community fortifies the nation state” (p. 7).

The eviction of Muslims along with anti-Muslim racism have existed long before 9/11; Muslims’ portrayal in the West was framed by the colonial imaginary of the exotic “Orient”, the backward and the enemy (Said, 1987; Maira, 2016), an imaginary that, to justify colonialism, created a collective portrayal of Muslims as “Others” with all its deficit connotations: dangerous and threatening outsiders (Peek, 2011; Maira, 2016), barbaric, misogynist and disloyal (Meer & Modood, 2009) and culturally “incompatible” (Mamdani, 2004). They have been confined to the portrait of ‘imperilled Muslim women, dangerous Muslim men’ (Razack, 2004, p.129).

In “the post-September world of surveillance, manufactured and orchestrated terror, and fear of the ‘other’” (Dolby & Rizvi, 2008, p.10), Muslims became the targeted “enemy-within”...
(Murray, 2004), “enemy-aliens” and “impossible subjects” (Abu-El Haj & Skilton, 2017), and consequently they have been subjects of racial profiling, enhanced security measures and more restricting policies such as the travel ban and the extradition. This situation shows that all Muslims have to assume responsibility for the atrocities of 9/11, 7/7, ISIS, for “in the name of securing the homeland, hypervigilant patriotism demands that the elusive threats of terrorism posed by a homogenized Muslim or Arab enemy ‘over there’ be reinscribed on the racialized bodies of religious, ethnic, and diasporic minorities ‘over here’” (Fadda-Conrey, 2014, p. 164).

In Canada, these young men and women have been targeted by increasing surveillance and different forms of discrimination (Helly, 2004). In fact, Muslims in Canada became security risks to the nation-state and “targeted transnationals” (Hennebry & Momani, 2013). 9/11 has changed the discourses and policies around immigration, multiculturalism, security and nationalism. Amery (2013) explains that:

Following 9/11, Arabs and Muslims in Canada were targeted by national security measures, which resulted in an active period of racialization fostered by immigration legislation, policy, and discourse. Global discussions on border control, security, and the ability of Arabs and/or Muslims to integrate into Western democratic nations were reignited. (p. 32)

The debate around Muslims in Canada has been a central topic for a long time, and it has particularly become a central focus during each election. This study started at the time of the 2015 federal elections, when the “Niqab” (face cover) of Zunera Ishaq was a major issue of controversy that divided the nation; the Ontario woman won court battles against Harper’s Conservative government, affirming her constitutional right to cover most of her face while taking the citizenship oath (The court.ca, March 2, 2015). The same Conservative government
under Steven Harper’s leadership passed Bill C-24 (2014) which allowed the government “to revoke Canadian citizens, not born in Canada, of their citizenship on the basis of threats to Canada’s national interest” and also “exile” offenders by sending them to their home countries. This law created “second class” citizens and was actually applied to numerous Muslim Canadians.

A range of court cases show that the Canadian government did not support Muslim Canadians who were arrested and stranded abroad. There are several examples: Canadian-Syrian Maher Arar was arrested and sent to Syria on false terrorist charges in 2002 (Abu-Laban & Nath, 2007; Perkel, 2016); Canadian child Omar Kadhr was imprisoned for years in Guantanamo Bay and in January 29, 2010, the Supreme Court ruled that Khadr's human rights were being violated at Guantanamo Bay. The court declared “that Canadian officials breached Khadr's right to life, liberty and security of the person under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms” (see Macklin, 2010); the academic Hassan Diab was extradited to France on false terrorist charges (CBC, May 1, 2018); Suaad Hagi Mohamud and Abdihakim Mohammed were held in Kenya on false charges of identity fraud; and Abousofian Abdelrazik was denied re-entry to Canada from Sudan (see Nyers, 2011). These cases show that Muslim Canadians are vulnerable citizens and can be stripped of their “Canadianness” if suspected of terrorist activities. In all these cases the government reneged on its duty to protect its citizens and acted against their constitutional rights. These cases send a clear message to Canadian Muslim youth that their loyalty to the nation-state has been questioned (Hennebry & Momani, 2013), and they are considered and treated as “disposable” citizens who can be easily stripped of their citizenship. In 2015, the same Conservative government passed the Anti-Terrorism Act or Bill C51 (2015) and pledged the creation of a hotline to report ‘Barbaric Cultural Practices’ (CBC, Oct 2, 2015).
Muslims are perceived not only as potential threats, but also as “impossible subjects” (Ngai, 2004) and their “Canadianness” is not only sometimes questioned and doubted, but mostly annihilated. A survey conducted by the Environics Institute (April 2016) asserts that 83% of the sample of 600 Muslims surveyed over the phone across Canada are “very proud” to be Canadian, compared to 73% of non-Muslims, and at the same time it indicated that 62% are worried about “discrimination against Muslims”, and that 35% “have experienced discrimination or unfair treatment during the last years” (p. 23). The survey concluded that “the angst of 9/11 has faded, but public concerns about the cultural integration of immigrants are growing, and Muslims continue to be viewed with discomfort, if not suspicion, by some” (p. 1). The survey received criticism as it was based on questions that reinforced the divide of “Muslim OR Canadian,” and its results reveal the dominant assumption that Muslims’ loyalty is questioned, and their ‘Canadianness’ must be measured.

I wrote the last chapters of this dissertation shortly after the 2019 elections, and right after Quebec passed the Secularism Act (Bill 21) that “would bar civil servants in positions of authority from wearing religious symbols at work”, including teachers, lawyers, and police officers. The law targets mostly Muslim women, and interestingly, during the 2019 election “all four main party leaders - Liberal Justin Trudeau, Conservative Andrew Scheer, New Democrat Jagmeet Singh and the Green Party's Elizabeth May - have denounced the secularism law. But they have stopped short of committing to challenging it” (CBC, Oct 5, 2019).

Statistics Canada confirm in their reports (2016, 2017, 2018) that the incidents of violence and hate crimes and the discourses and policies of exclusion have increased considerably since Trump’s victory in the USA and the rise of white supremacist voices in Canada. An increase is noticed in disturbing racial and hate crimes targeting mosques, Muslim
schools, veiled women, school-aged kids and particularly young Muslim airplane passengers. In fact, hate crimes reached an all-time high in 2017, according to Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada, November 2018). The exclusion of Muslims is not restricted to the media discourses and political decisions, it is not limited to an emotional “fear of Muslim”, but it has a much more dangerous impact. It has real consequences as employment statistics demonstrate that although well-educated, Muslims have the highest rate of unemployment after Indigenous peoples in Canada, and income statistics show that Muslims earn less than any other religious group in Canada (Beyer, 2005; Kazempur, 2104).

In sum, despite the fact that 19 years have passed since 9/11, Muslims are still considered the number one security threat and the ‘suspect community’ that needs to be surveilled and monitored (Bakht, 2008; Breen-Smyth, 2018; MacDonald, 2015; Selod, 2018), and also the cultural viral threat that needs to be quarantined.

Exploring Muslim youth identity in Canada cannot be addressed without connecting identity to the framework of multiculturalism that regulates the lives of the people of color and the visible minorities in Canada. It is important to understand the historical context and the epistemological assumptions that produce the discourses of multiculturalism. Canadian Multiculturalism has been always contested (Guo & Wong, 2015; Wright, 2012, 2017), but it remains “as one of the most important symbols of the country’s national identity” (Environics Institute, 2015, p. 2). Wright (2017) confirms that “multiculturalism (especially in its liberal, celebratory form) remains dominant as official policy, national ideology, the primary approach to diversity in fields like education and Canadians’ common sense understanding of sociocultural diversity and, indeed, national identity” (p. 168). It is important to understand how the dominant liberal multiculturalism defines what “Canadianness” is and how Muslims are framed within
Canadian multiculturalism. After 9/11, several policies have been adopted to enhance security, and discourses of heightened nationalism have emerged to deepen the divide between the true Canadians and the Others. Muslims, with the history of Orientalism, 9/11 and terrorism, have become problematic within the idealistic imaginary of Canadian multiculturalism. The recent Quebec Secularism Act comes to trouble the idealistic image of multiculturalism and confirms Porter’s vision that Canadian multiculturalism constructs a “vertical mosaic” (Porter, 1965) of cultures where we have a dominant, unmarked core Anglo-Canadian culture and French-Canadian culture in opposition to the Native-Canadian culture and the “Other” multicultural-Canadian culture. These cultures are not represented equally and do not enjoy the same power status. Muslims, in this “vertical mosaic” (Porter, 1965), do not occupy any privileged spaces. These facts show a clear indication that multiculturalism in Canada sits uncomfortably with Muslims and their practices (Razack, 2008; Thobani, 2007; Zine, 2004).

Despite Multiculturalism policies and discourses, Muslims in Canada, similar to the situation in Europe and the US (Keaton, 2006) are racialized bodies, that possess specific traits that other them and position them at the margin of Canadianness. Garner and Selod (2015) argue:

the process of racialization entails ascribing sets of characteristics viewed as inherent to members of a group because of their physical or cultural traits. These are not limited to skin tone or pigmentation but include a myriad of attributes including cultural traits such as language, clothing, and religious practices. (4).

The “Hijab” marks women’s bodies as submissive, oppressed and anti-feminist, speaking Arabic position Muslim travellers as potential terrorists and the Muslim names can be a reason to be surveilled, arrested and jailed (Selod, 2018). Muslims in the West, regardless of their races and
ethnicities have been associated with the “Muslim” race and they are positioned at the bottom of the racial hierarchy (Bonilla-Silva, 2004, Jackson, 2011).

Canadian Multiculturalism, in all its contested meanings, debates, discourses and policies, and the racialization of Muslims are central in this dissertation and in each chapter there will be a discussion of the role they play in the lives of young Muslims and in particular in connection to the participants’ experiences in and outside schools (Miled, 2019), and how they shape their everyday encounters.

The local context in Canada, and the global context, make the question of how Muslim youth perceive their “Muslimness” in relation to their “Canadianness” a timely topic. I argue in this dissertation that it is urgent to find out how these young men and women perceive their identities and how they live, perform and construct their sense of who they are and where they belong in the midst of a local and global climate of “discomfort”. Exploring their perceptions and experiences would have great implications on their citizenship, belonging, education pathways and life opportunities.

1.1.3 Globalization, transnationalism and transculturalism: Interrogating the “roots” and the “routes”

I situate this inquiry within the macro terrain of globalization, transnationalism, transculturalism, forced migration and immigration, and I entered this research with the understanding that, similar to all young people their age, Muslim youth are straddling different worlds as they are exposed to different cultures, forms of knowledge and ways of knowing, being and becoming. They are on “the move” (Dolby & Rizvi, 2008); they are “not confined to a fixed territory” but are “parts of multiple spatial networks and temporal linkages” (Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 186). In line with Abu-El Haj and Bonet (2011), I argue that “to understand the
experiences of youth from Muslim transnational communities - in schools and society - we must examine how the processes of globalization and imperialism take shape in their everyday lives” (p. 34).

I locate Muslim youth within the reality of mobility and globalization, which “is not just an ‘out there’ phenomenon. It refers not only to the emergence of large-scale world systems, but to transformations in the very texture of everyday life. It is an ‘in here’ phenomenon, affecting even the intimacies of personal identity” (Giddens, 1991, p. 367). Globalization, with its different manifestations and flows, such as mobility, technologies, policies, militarization and discourses, shapes and reshapes youths’ identities, imaginaries and lives.

It is important to acknowledge that young people’s experiences, perceptions, and culture are no longer determined only by their families, schools and nation-state discourses and institutions but also connect to a global youth culture that has emerged to defy the boundaries of the nation-state. Besley (2003) argues that “now, more than ever, kids find their identities and values in the marketplace, rather than in traditional sources such as the family, church, and school that comprise a locality, and moreover, that marketplace is an increasingly globalized one” (p. 167).

Appadurai (1996), Ray (2007), Rizvi and Lingard (2009) argue that globalization shapes imagination, dreams, desires and social imaginary and “the flow across cultures of ideas, goods, and people at unprecedented speed, scope, and quantity - has profound implications for identity formation in adolescence (ages 10-18) and emerging adulthood (ages 18-29)” (Jensen et al., 2011, p. 285). Culture acquired a new meaning with globalization, as “[it] becomes less of Bourdieu’s habitus and more an arena for conscious choice, justification and representation” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 44).
With globalization there has been a profound shift in people’s conceptualization of their identities and sense of belonging. Globalization has created a form of cultural fluidity and a youth culture that defies authentic home culture and national identity “as people and places are drawn seemingly closer together, local cultures are no longer immune from international cross-fertilization. Mass communication systems and changing patterns of consumption - including the development of youth, niche and lifestyle markets - have broadened the range of youth identities available in a global marketplace” (Nayak, 2003, p. 106).

Globalization is far from being a just and equitable system, particularly to the underprivileged youth facing the increasing global problems of poverty, hunger, disease, war, inadequate schooling, exploitation, abuse (Hopson et al., 2008), displacement and surveillance. Dolby and Rizvi (2008) add, “the reality of the intensification of globalization for most of us is more contradictory: capital moves easily, bodies which control capital move easily, but bodies which are more expendable or peripheral are largely constrained” (p. 2). As part of the peripheral sphere, Muslim youth are eventually under multiple forms of constraints.

Globalization has a dark side too and, as Kellner (2002) explains, 9/11 and its aftermaths “points to the objective ambiguity of globalization: that positive and negative sides are interconnected, that the institutions of the open society unlock the possibilities of destruction and violence as well as those of democracy” (p. 291). Radicalization itself is a phenomenon that was highly served by global networks and technological flows, and some youth from different countries fell into the trap of the “Jihadism” dogma from the comfort of their own bedrooms (Rudner, 2016). Social media and the internet became new and easy ways to recruit young people and to surmount nation-state boundaries.
In this research, I draw on the argument of the cultural theorist Sunaina Maira (2004) that there has been a strong “epistemological barricade” between youth culture studies and theories of globalization, and that we should pay more attention to the intertwined local-global dynamics that regulate youth, especially transnational youth. Maira (2004) suggests that “youth culture and education researchers need to move beyond approaches that are largely local or national in focus, or even universalist in their assumptions, to be able to link schooling and youth development to a globalized context” (p. 207). Muslim youth in Canada are part of local contexts and networks that inform how they see themselves, their Muslim identities and Canadian belonging; however, these local contacts are intertwined with multiples networks, communities and connections that transcend national borders. In the study of Muslim youth, it is important to see these young women and men perform and perceive who they are and where they belong informed by “glocal” negotiations that are consciously and unconsciously engaged in (Kraidy, 1999; Robertson, 1995).

1.1.4 Reflexivity: The Muslim feminist researcher

My research ultimately emanates from my positionality as a Muslim woman, claiming a conversation that goes beyond academic secularism and how it regulates research, bodies and narratives. I am using here Spivak’s strategic essentialism concept (1993), and I strategically position myself as a “Muslim” to start the conversation, in line with Hall (1989) “You have to position yourself somewhere in order to say anything at all” (p. 18). I position my research within a feminist framework, although I focus on both Muslim young men and women, with a special focus on the dynamics of gender, the language and behavior of sexism and the dominant patriarchy within the everyday dynamics of the relationships and encounters of young Muslim women and men in their school. My research explores the interplay of religion, gender, race, class and status
and how these multiple intersections inform both how these young men and women perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others.

I entered this project with several uncertainties, but I am certainly aware that I am engaging with my research from multiple positions, contested locations and most definitely a complex perspective of who I am in my research and how I am positioned vis-a-vis my participants; I am a third world woman in first world academia, a visibly marked Muslim woman (wearing a veil), a North-African woman, an Arab woman, a Canadian immigrant, an academic, a mother, and a teacher. On one hand, I am from the global South, and I am located “in terms of the underdevelopment, oppressive traditions, high illiteracy, rural and urban poverty, religious fanaticism, and ‘overpopulation’ of particular Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American countries” (Mohanty, 1991, p.5), and on the other hand, I am the privileged First World Ph.D. student and Canadian citizen. I admit that in being an academic and a citizen of the first world whose faith, race and “culture” place her in the third world, the concept of positionality becomes essential to reflect on and to unravel.

As a researcher “standing on shifting ground makes it clear that every view is a view from somewhere and every act of speaking is speaking from somewhere” (Abu-Lughod, 1991, p. 468). With these multiple locations and positions, and as a researcher who is negotiating transnational identities, I emphasize that I am in this regard, adopting a postmodern gaze that denounces interpretivist and modernistic feminists whose practices of positioning often, as Marcus (1998) points out, “get stuck in a sterile form of identity politics, in which it is reduced to a formulaic incantation at the beginning of ethnographic papers in which one boldly ‘comes clean’ and pronounces a positioned identity” (p. 401). I argue that I am unable to claim such a “clear” identity and, like Mohanty (2003), I am straddling; “I straddle both categories. I am of
the Two-Thirds World in the One-Third World. I am clearly a part of the social minority now, with all its privileges; however, my political choices, struggles, and vision for change place me alongside the Two-Thirds World” (p. 507). Hence, I argue that ethnographic researchers are challenged by their identit(ies) and how they inform research choices, process and outcomes. In this section, I try to “locate” myself and explore my multiple positions to navigate my research. I acknowledge that I mainly draw on the work of Third World” (Mohanty, 2003) feminists and “women of color” feminists, (such as Brah, 1996; Chaudhry, 1997; Khan, 2008, Lugones, 2010; Minn-Ha, 1989; Mirza, 2008; Mohanty, 2003, 2013; Razack, 2010; Spivak 1990, 1993; Thobani, 2007; Villenas, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 2008, Zine, 2008). I need here to explain that I am using the above terms interchangeably as they “designate a political constituency… as a viable oppositional alliance is a common context of struggles rather than color or racial identifications” (Mohanty, 1991, p. 7, emphasis in original). I position my work within “a feminist critical impulse” that is advocating for different epistemologies and recognizes that there are different “knowledges” and “truths” (Dillard, 2006). It is a feminism that does not capitulate to possessive individualism, a feminism that does not assume that democracy requires capitalism, a feminism that is bold and willing to take risks, a feminism that fights for women’s rights while simultaneously recognizing the pitfalls of the formal ‘rights’ structure of capitalist democracy. (Yuval-Davis, 2008, p. 21)

It is also a feminism that defies borders and works towards feminist solidarity that transcends the boundaries of geographies, ethnicities, cultures, sexual orientation, and copes with the current challenges of displacement, im/migration, transnationalism, racism, sexism and imperialism. I center here the voices of third world women and women of color, and I engage with a feminism that does not exclude my voice as a Muslim woman while it challenges liberal
feminist frameworks. It is the feminism that transcends borders and acknowledges that there is no one sense of a border, that the lines between and through nations, races, classes, sexualities, religions, and disabilities are real—and that a feminism without borders must envision change and social justice work across these lines of demarcation and division. I want to speak of feminism without silences and exclusions in order to draw attention to the tension between the simultaneous plurality and narrowness of borders and the emancipatory potential of crossing through, with, and over these borders in our everyday lives. (Mohanty, 2003)

I deeply engage with feminism for social justice (Mohanty, 2003) and undertake feminist research as praxis (Lather, 2001). In line with Richa Nagar and Amanda Lock Swarr (2010), I think that “instead of investing ourselves in claiming feminism, then, we suggest that grounding feminisms in activist communities everywhere is a means to interrogate all forms of implicit and explicit relations of power (e.g., racist/classist/casteist), and to contest those power relations through ongoing processes of self-critique and collective reflection” (p. 5). My research centers women’s experiences and voices in relation to the different power dynamics that regulate their lives, bodies, imaginaries and world views.

1.2 Theorizing Muslim youth identities

In this inquiry, I framed my theorization of Muslim identities in line with Rattansi & Phoenix (2005) as they contend that

increasingly, the frame has to be one in which the intersections of the local/global have to be at the centre of theorizations. At the same time research investigations have to keep the multiplicity, relative fluidity and hybridity or syncretism of youth identities also in
focus, without forgetting that identificatory processes always occur in micro-sites. (p. 118)

I conducted this study with the understanding that it is necessary to deconstruct the category of “Muslim” as it has been constituted in colonial, imperialist and orientalist discourses (Said, 1978) that have overshadowed the differentiated, heterogeneous, lived realities and embodied experiences of Muslims, and also the many ways they resisted different forms of oppression.

It is important to highlight that modernist frameworks have failed to grasp the multiplicity, fluidity, liquidity and context-dependent operation of youth identities and identifications (Anthias, 2008; Brah, 1996). In this inquiry, I employed complex theorization frameworks regarding the question of Muslim and youth identity and belonging (Abu El Haj & Bonet, 2011; Anthias, 1998, 2008, 2012; Brah, 1996; Hall, 1992, 1996; Maira, 2004; Rattansi, 1992; Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005). “Identity” is a complex and contested concept that nonetheless plays a central role in ongoing debates about gender, nationalism, ethnicity, culture and citizenship. I theorize Muslim youth identity acknowledging that identities “are visibly marked on the body itself, guiding if not determining the way we perceive and judge others and are perceived and judged by them” (Alcoff, 2006, p. 5). “Being” Muslim is usually visible, as it can be detected from name, dress, place of birth, language, color and culture (Alcoff, 2006). Being born as a Muslim has real world effects; it has real implications and real consequences. Moya (2000) confirms that,

the significance of identity depends partly on the fact that goods and resources are still distributed according to identity categories. Who we are—that is, who we perceive ourselves or are perceived by others to be—will significantly affect our life chances:
where we can live, whom we will marry (or whether we can marry), and what kinds of educational and employment opportunities will be available to us. (p. 8)

I argue in this study that to understand Muslim youth identities and their sense of belonging to Canada, it is extremely important to shift the focus from the rigid discourses of the cultural conflict that have for a long time homogenized Muslims and overshadowed the issues of inequality, marginalization and racialization which affect Muslim youth and racialized communities (Reitz & Banerjee, 2007), and also to pay attention to the differentiated experiences of Muslims in relation to their different locations and the intersections of the different axes of their identities; race, class, gender, socio-economic status, religious visibility, culture and status.

In this study, I draw on concepts that are closely associated with ‘identity’ and that have acquired new meanings with postcolonial theory, critical feminism and intersectionality, diaspora and anti-essentialism (Gilroy, 1991, 2000; Said & Hall, 1990, 1993), the hyphenated selves (Sirin & Fine, 2007), translocational positionality (Anthias, 2006, 2008) and “strategic essentialism”, belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2005, 2006) and home (Brah, 1996; Hooks, 2009; Minh-Ha, 1991). I employ these concepts to look at Muslim youth identity negotiations “as a dynamic production of meaning in a context of incommensurable demands, rather than a fixed and essentializing category grounded in narratives of territoriality, origin and/or originality” (Miled & Andreotti, 2015, p. 30).

These concepts are articulating identity from an anti-essentialist perspective that captures the interplay of the local and the global, the impact of colonialism and the effect of mobility and transnationalism. With these tools of analysis, and through the different chapters, I emphasize the interplay of two facets of Muslim youth identities. First, they “are engaged in constant
negotiation between multiple sources of identification with their religious beliefs, ethnic background, gender, class, and nationality” (Hosseini, 2013, p. 465). Second, there are certain common identity markers that can make talking about “Muslim” identity possible and meaningful. Hence, Identity is not only about roots but is about routes, in Stuart Hall’s words; it is:

a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (p. 394)

Hall’s statement points out that identity has roots in specific culture and history, but it changes and witnesses constant transformation as it is the production of the intersections of past and present histories with the current position and context. It is also subject to the “routes” we take as they shape who we are at present and in the future. Identity as “routes” is very important for Muslims in the diaspora. It is important to shift from identity “obviousness” and recognize that it is far from being the simple issue that its currency in both government and marketplace makes it appear to be. Where the word becomes a concept, identity has been made central to a number of urgent theoretical and political issues, not least belonging, ethnicity, and nationality. (Gilroy, 2000, p. 56)

The epistemological shifts in researching identities, and youth identities in particular, have informed the methodological decisions regarding youth research. This explains my decision to conduct an ethnographic study, and also to use a visual participatory method, because during my fieldwork I came to realize that it is essential to be immersed in a context that would allow
for a long and meaningful encounter with youth to see, observe, feel and grasp how they feel and what they think. Identities are constructed within specific contexts and framed by people’s daily encounters. Relying solely on surveys, focus groups and interviews would not allow me to collect thick data that would capture the multifaceted experiences I was able to see and present without combining ethnographic methods with participatory visual methods. I realized that knowing how young people label themselves does not indicate how they live their lives or what are their cultural practices. A clear research implication here is that studies of youth identities cannot rely on methodologies such as survey research which only take account of ‘attitudes’ while ignoring the ethnographic necessity of close or ‘thick’ description of the myriad ways in which actual identities are constructed and reworked in different social contexts. (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005, p. 107)

In the four chapters that constitute the main body of this dissertation, I use different methods and look from different angles to argue that Muslim youth identity is complex, emerging and constituted from both local and transnational forces; it is multilayered rather than one “boxed in rigid boundaries” (Abu-El Haj, 2007; Khan, 2002. p. xvi).

To capture these negotiations and the way they make sense of who they are and where they belong, and to observe how these young men and women feel, perform, and represent being Muslim and/or Canadian, the school was my choice to be my “field” of inquiry. It represented the only place where I would have the opportunity to meet and know and “hang out” (Ibrahim, 2014) with young Muslim high schoolers.
1.3 School experiences and youth identities.

This research explores the process of Muslim youth identity negotiations in a school setting. Like Nespor (1997), I view the school as more than a closed, self-contained space, and I agree with his statement that “I look at one school as an intersection in social space, a knot in a web of practices that stretch into complex systems beginning and ending outside the school” (Nespor, 1997, p. xiii). The school as a social environment is part of a larger web of power dynamics, contested discourses, conflicting policies, and practices that are informed not only by the localities of the nation state but also by the global flows of images, values and imaginaries; all this eventually impacts how students see themselves and how they are perceived, since “explicitly and implicitly, educational systems and institutions imbue value into specific histories, ideals, lives, systems, ideologies, and futures” (Sanya et al., 2018, p. 1). Handel Wright (2012) contends in this context that

We live in a time of globalization in which the local and even the national are quite increasingly taken up in relation to the global – whether unreflexively as a taken-for-granted conception of the status quo or more thoughtfully, as historicized and examined through or alongside nuanced concepts of transnationalism, the diaspora, cosmopolitanism and the glocal. Education is no exception. (p. 103)

Schools are contested spaces; they are political and ideological terrains informed by not only the local but also the global. They are sites where children and youth go through an endless process of negotiations, contestations, assimilation and/or resistance as they come to understand what their position is in the larger society, and start making sense of who they are and what they are expected to be and to become (Giroux, 2005, 2009; Reay, 2010); in fact, schools “provide a primary setting where global teens engage actively in the self-aware processes of renegotiating
their individual and collective identities among their peers” (Forman, 2001, p. 35). At school, children and teens come to be actively engaged in the processes of renegotiating their individual and collective identities and making sense of their positionalities. The impact of schools on the identity formation of youth is undoubtedly huge because of their credentializing role, and schools as social organizations have a special dimension in the lives of youth and the way they make sense of their position and value in the wider society.

The abundant literature available on schools and the role they play in children’s and youth’s social, psychological and economic well-being, and how they impact their identities, demonstrate that schools have kept a paramount role in this fast-changing time and “within such constantly changing understandings of identity what has remained constant is the critical role schooling plays in identity formation. No other public institution is as crucial for the development of the identities children and young people will carry into adulthood” (Reay, 2010, p. 277). It is hard to think of an institution that would impact children and youth the way schools do. Paul Willis (2003) captures the interplay of the local/global in the school yards and classrooms; he affirms that “schools are one of the principal sites for the dialectical playing out of these apparent disjunctions and contradictions, which, while misunderstood, underlie some of the most urgent education debates - from traditionalism versus progressivism to the canon versus multiculturalism” (p. 390).

From a perspective that engages with school experiences as multi-layered, nuanced and complex, I decided to do my research in a high school where I would see how these young men and women negotiate their identities and how they understand, perform and represent being Muslim and/or Canadian in the context of their everyday life school experiences. The school setting represents a unique space to conduct research with youth and to have the opportunity to
engage with them for a long time, establishing a strong bond and trust that would allow for a deep exploration of their perspectives and attitudes and to better understand the complexities of their experiences. In line with Alcoff (2006), I argue that:

the topic of identity is best approached in very specific context-based analyses. This locality and specificity is necessary because identities are constituted by social contextual conditions of interaction in specific cultures at particular historical periods, and thus their nature, effects, and the problems that need to be addressed in regard to them will be largely local. (p.10)

Muslim youth school experiences in Canadian public schools are complex experiences that are still understudied, and there is a need to unpack the everyday experiences that inform their identity negotiations and sense of belonging or unbelonging. Hence, this study contributes to the limited research about Muslim youth in Western Canada. This research study acknowledges that we need more studies that document the actual everyday experiences of youth from Muslim transnational communities in their schools, families, and communities to understand how their experiences, discourses, and practices are shaped by, and in turn respond to, processes of globalization, nationalism, and imperialism. (Abu-El Haj & Bonet, 2011, p. 55)

It is also important to examine these experiences inside schools as Rummens & Sefa Dei (2013) confirmed in their exploration of the Canadian context that youth marginalization and ‘exclusion’ through schooling and education needs to be understood as something more than mere omission - deliberate or otherwise - of life
ways, knowledge systems, and every-day lived experiences. Social exclusion is instead a political, material, psychological, and spiritual mindset, action, and practice that favours some and disadvantages others. (pp. 118-119)

1.4 Muslims in Canadian schools: Previous research

The available literature shows that the situation of Muslims in their diaspora has always been contested and enigmatic. Being conceived as culturally unfit, Muslims have been subjected to a long history of misrepresentation and “othering” (Said, 1979).

In Canada, Jasmin Zine (2000, 2001) and Ozlem Sensoy (2007, 2008) were the pioneers in opening the conversation about Muslim youth in schools and focusing on the situated school experiences of Muslims in Canada. Stonebanks and Sensoy (2011), through their personal narratives as “assumed” to be Muslims and immigrants in Canadian schools before the events of 9/11, portrayed the experiences of marginalization and stigmatization that Muslims can go through; their narratives highlighted the complexity of schooling and the role of schools in shaping the students’ sense of belonging. Their narratives demonstrate how schools were othering and isolating them. They contend relying on their personal experiences that

Schools, from primary to higher education, continue to be a source where our sense of self must be negotiated with the master narrative. Is it a coincidence that although we live in cities that are over four and a half thousand kilometers apart, we both share so many experiences about being ‘the other’ in schools from our lives as students to professors? Our stories, among the many narratives, involve teachers who never saw the need to understand who we were, student-teachers who were confused or angry about the knowledge we brought to class, and colleagues who framed the Middle Eastern
experience as a problem ‘over there’ and expect a ‘thank you’ for the civility they have provided to us ‘over here’. (p. 73)


Baljit Nagra (2011), in an empirical study conducted in Canada (Toronto) with Muslim youth aged 18-30, confirmed that her participants expressed a strong connection to their religious identity, a form of a “reactive identity for resistance” (p. 433) and to transform the mainstream assumption about Islam and Muslims. In this study the participants also showed a strong sense of “being Canadian”. They expressed a strong pride in being Canadian, and it seems that “in the Canadian context, facing discrimination does not necessarily lead to a weakened national identity”; she explained that the participants refer to the discourses of multiculturalism and how this puts Canada in a better position compared to Europe and the US. They negotiate their identities as Muslim and Canadian, not Muslim or Canadian. They articulate a “hyphenated” identity, which is a “dialectic labor of psychological reconciliation” (Sirin & Fine, 2007, p. 151). An interesting finding of the study is that few participants claim their Islamic identity or an Islamic way of life similar to their parents. This confirms Cesari’s (2004) findings that second-generation Muslims do not connect with their religious identity in a way that is similar to their parents, as their connection to the “home” culture and traditions is weak.

In another empirical study conducted in Quebec, Canada, Rousseau et al. (2013) explored a group of twenty Algerian and Moroccan immigrant parents and children’s perceptions and
reactions to the “War on Terror (WOT)”. The study emphasized the hurt associated with the events, and how parents try to protect their kids by enhancing their ethnic and religious belonging; interestingly, the parents emphasized the role of schools in protecting their children from the negative representation and aftermaths of 9/11. The study found out that many parents find their children’s schools in Quebec supportive in protecting them from discriminatory attitudes and practices.

Among the rare studies that focused on school-age participants and/or took place in schools in Canada using ethnographic methods (see Abo-Zina et al, 2009; Bakali, 2016; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009; Watt, 2016; Zine, 2001, 2004), there is a consensus on the negative school experiences of Muslim youth; they experience marginalization, exclusion, bullying, and often are the target of Islamophobic and racist stereotypes.

In the literature that emerged after 9/11, especially in the US and Britain, questions of identity, citizenship and belonging have been major topics in several studies (see Abu-El Haj, 2007; Abu-El Haj and Bonet, 2011; Ajroush & Jamal, 2007; Maira, 2004, 2009, 2016; Sirin & Fine, 2008). These studies have initiated a new dimension, and they problematized the taken-for-granted Islamic identity. In their studies conducted in the US, Abu-El Haj (2007) and Sirin & Fine (2008) have demonstrated that after 9/11 transnational Arab Muslim youth have increasingly self-identified as “Muslim” or “Arab” as a way to resist and defy the discourses of blame and accusation and the exclusion they feel in their schools. It was a way to find a sense of belonging to an imaginary distant community. The same finding was reached in a study conducted by Sunaina Maira (2004) in the US with South Asian Muslim immigrants. Her participants emphasized their belonging to a remote country of origin without undermineing their American citizenship. Those studies raised attention to the difference between belonging and
citizenship or, in Yuval-Davis’ (2006) expression, between “belonging and the politics of belonging”.

Most studies about Muslim youth and their school experiences have been predominantly grounded in the cultural difference model, a paradigm that focuses on the cultural difference between home culture and the school culture (Maira, 2004). Abundant literature was tied to the cultural conflict, where Muslim youth are represented as a monolithic group, torn between the Western school culture and the home culture; it is a paradigm that deals with Islamic identity as a clear and bounded identity (Abu-El Haj & Bonet, 2011). This limited framework perceives identity as fixed and static and overshadows the power of schooling experiences and globalization in (re)shaping youth identity (Rizvi, 2005).

Most of the reviewed studies conducted in Canada found that Muslim youth feel misunderstood, excluded and also feel they are “second-class” citizens. However, they expressed a strong attachment to Canada and especially to the values of multiculturalism (Bakht, 2008).

Overall, studies focusing on Muslim youth do not sufficiently emphasize the religious dimension as an important axis of differentiation and a major identity marker, when intersecting with gender, race, class, immigration status, culture…etc., can produce different forms of identities. I argue that it is extremely important to shift the focus from the rigid binary discourses of the conflict between a monolithic Islamic identity and a Canadian one to be able to recognize the diverse experiences of Muslim youth from an intersectional framework.

With Abu-El Haj (2007), Maira (2004), Sirin and Fine (2007) in the US, the school experiences of Muslim youth diaspora have been examined from a more intersectional lens, a frame that aligns with Avtar Brah’s that “diaspora is a heterogeneous category. It is differentiated internally, as well as in its relationship to the social divisions in broader society.
The concept of intersectionality is critical in engaging with the complexity of such
differentiations and divisions” (Roman & Henry, 2015, p. 52).

In this dissertation I focus on the differentiated experiences and perspectives, the
complexities of identity negotiations among Muslim youth and their multifaceted experiences of
being and becoming. In this endeavor I contend in line with Handel Wright (2003) that

identity is not only plural but conspicuously so: our focus is not on the wholeness of the
researcher but on the many discourses with (and indeed against) which the research
identifies. Second, identity is not seen as given and complete but as open and in process,
as both being and becoming. Third, identity is seen as relational and elements will gain
prominence or recede depending on the circumstances the subject occupies and the others
in the given situation. Fourth, identity is not essential (whether in the biological or even
cultural sense) but much more loosely and tenuously a manifestation of a series of
identification. …Finally, identity is not necessarily benign let alone positive but rather is
double edged, both enabling and oppressive. (p. 207)

1.5 Overview of the dissertation

The specific format of my dissertation is referred to as a manuscript-based dissertation. It is
composed of six chapters: this introduction, a conclusion, and the body of the dissertation,
composed of four chapters. Each chapter is an independent piece of academic writing, but
together they are conceptually and methodologically interconnected. The four chapters report on
my doctoral journey and a long, exhausting, emotional but fascinating fieldwork experience. In
the following chapters of this dissertation, I will present contrasting facets of my research by
using a range of lenses, methods and engaging with a diverse range of participants. Rather than
report on my study in the usual straightforward, chronological order, I am choosing to use write-ups that reflect peaks and major findings along the way from what is a difficult, circuitous, and episodic process. During two years of field work, I became aware that I wanted to write a dissertation that would report on my journey of curiosity, questioning, loss, learning, resistance and mostly a journey that was far from being a taken for granted, straightforward, preconceived, and well-planned trip. This work is a form of inquiry, seeking new ways of seeing, listening, interpreting and intervening in the world. It is a form of constant questioning of what “Research” is by drawing on Denzin’s (2019) call that

There is a need to unsettle traditional concepts of what counts as research, as evidence, as legitimate inquiry. We ask how, not why, questions. How can such work become part of the public conversation? Who can speak for whom? How are voices to be represented? Can we forge new models of performance, representation, intervention and praxis, inquiry as critique, not as research? Can we rethink what we mean by ethical inquiry, focusing on the moral and ethical implications of an action in a concrete situation? (p. 723)

Sometimes the researcher is both part of and somewhat removed from the topic at hand and the participants, and for marginalized researchers and participants in particular this can make for very intense and complex relationships. In my case, the academic work of a Muslim woman cannot be disconnected from the deep-inside urge to engage with my academic work as a “praxis-oriented” research (Lather, 1991), to bring a lens that would capture my subjective self in the research, the detours I had to take and the novel ways of knowing with which I was tempted to experiment. I confirm, just like Handel Wright (2003), that I am taking my research personally because questions of experience, identity and representation and the autobiographical are central in this text and it is important to point out at the outset that for me these are not given, fixed
notions nor sources of authenticity but rather constructed, procedural, multiple, overlapping, contradictory and performative. (p. 809)

In this dissertation, I weave my story together with the different stories of these young women and men; we are carrying the label, the “burden” of being Muslim and/or Canadian. Each chapter presents a unique lens on how I explored Muslim youth identity negotiations and sense of belonging to Canada.

This dissertation went through multiple phases and detours; it was hard to predict how things would unfold as the complexities I encountered in the field necessitated that I re-think my methods and my “interventions” as a feminist researcher (Abu-loghod, 2002)

My research journey was one of curiosity and learning from varied disciplines. This dissertation presents the interdisciplinary dimensions in this study and how it is informed by such contrasting research interests such as, ethnic studies, sociology of education, youth studies, ethnography, autoethnography, transnational feminism, participatory visual research and migration studies.

The four chapters (2, 3, 4 & 5) report on the stages of my research journey and the different methods I engaged with. The chapters explore the research questions using diverse lenses, and in each chapter I report on different participants, bringing forward their diverse voices and narratives. Contrasting points of view are shown, but not assimilated into the authorial voice. This type of narrative is more open-ended and demands more from the reader. It does not do all of the thinking for the reader. Instead, it shows how messy and contingent reality can be. (Richards, 2008, p. 1723)

Chapter Two is an autoethnography where I explain how I started my inquiry, and my deep reflection on my lived experience as a Muslim, immigrant educator and academic. I offer reflexive narratives of crossing transnational borders, and of my experiences of migration,
immigration and settlement. This chapter highlights that we live in self-reflexive times. We can no longer pretend that our research personae are separate from the places and contexts we seek to understand. Methods play a role in making the worlds we inhabit. Our insights get appropriated, reworked and transformed: they go places and become part of the messy realities of social life. Scholarly knowledge is never innocent or pure – it always comes with baggage. (Mills & Morton, 2013, p. 2)

This autoethnography brings the voices of two women of color (Neila Miled and Vanessa Andreotti) inhabiting differently marked racialized bodies, female academics coming from non-Western countries. These narratives highlight the complexities and paradoxes of making sense of one’s existence in the world within multiple incommensurable scripts of belonging. This chapter introduces the centrality of my subjective experiences in this inquiry and where I explore contested theorizations of identities from a postcolonial lens, and I explain how these inform my research. I also contextualize my research, as I am exploring the connection between identity, belonging and Canadian multiculturalism and interculturalism. This chapter presents my starting theorizations and how my embodied experiences as a Muslim, immigrant woman, a mother and educator inform being and becoming Muslim and/or Canadian, seeking home and negotiating belonging. In this chapter we draw on Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha’s scholarship and their theorization of identity. We also present Paulston’s (2000) methodology of social cartography and the dynamic conceptualizations of self and other, emphasizing differences in conceptualizations of identity, relationality, and power. The chapter maps my roots and routes, presents the complexities of being “here” and “there,” in-between, and seeking home that might be nowhere. The chapter introduces the important questions that frame my research and concepts of home and belonging, which are explored with Muslim youth participants.
In Chapter Three, I continue my reflections on my positionality as I enter the field and start my research. The chapter reports on my epistemological and methodological choices and the different dilemmas I encountered during my fieldwork. It provides a review of critical ethnography, its origins, and how it is different from other forms of ethnography. It explains my engagement with reflexivity, unpacks my positionality and discusses the contested meanings of voice and representation in critical ethnography. In this chapter I also discuss the complexity of the insider/outsider positionality for a Muslim researcher doing research with Muslim youth, and how I started thinking of using a participatory visual method to listen to the “silent” voices of a group of Muslim girls with a refugee background. Language, low-self-esteem, displacement, loss and trauma can be different barriers to inhibit refugees and particularly young women from speaking about their identity negotiations and experiences. The sense of frustration in dealing with constant silence among a group of Muslim young women with refugee backgrounds reminded me of my own vulnerability, but also of my ethical commitment to decenter my authority (Sanger, 2003), as expressing the silence of marginalized individuals is fundamental to ethnography (Clair, 1998). Breaking the silence with photovoice was a detour in my fieldwork journey and the next chapter tells the continued story.

Chapter Four focuses on my ethnographic journey during the first year of fieldwork; I detail my ethnographic methods and present the major findings emerging from the interviews with seven participants (out of twelve). This chapter explores how Muslim high schoolers identify themselves, reflect on their religious identity and how they feel about belonging or unbelonging to Canada and the impact of their school experiences on this process. I theorize Muslim youth identities using translocational positionality, anti-essentialism and intersectionality as analytical lenses. Findings show the multiple facets of how participants perform
“Muslimness”, negotiate “Canadianness” and manage the fluid “in-betweenness” that characterizes their glocal lives. The paper presents the complexities of these experiences in exploring the centrality of race in defining how these young men and women feel about being Muslim and/or Canadian, and the situated ways in which these young men and women engage with their “Muslim” and/or Canadian identities, as there is a shift from the essentialized self-understanding and self-representation of Muslim identity shaped by transnational belonging, global youth culture and new forms of identification and engagement with religion, culture and belonging that go beyond territoriality.

Chapter Five emerges from my methodological frustrations and ethical dilemmas. Using interviews to learn about the experiences of Muslim youth was necessary and helpful, but I was not able capture the silent voices, the voices of the most vulnerable among these youth, namely girls who were refugees with limited English language skills. This chapter reports on the photovoice project I conducted during my second year of fieldwork. I never planned to embark on a photovoice project when I drafted my proposal and gained access to the school to start my fieldwork. As I completed the interview phase, I thought I had reached data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015; O’Reilly & Parker, 2012). I thought I would be able to capture the experiences of Muslim youth and their perspectives and grasp their daily negotiations with the ethnographic methods I designed. However, I came to realize that with all the interviews I conducted, the fieldnotes and observations I jotted down, there was a gap that I had to fill. This chapter reports on how the frustrations of my fieldwork metamorphosed into a creative project that enriched my study; it was clear that “there is no one-size fits-all method to reach data saturation; moreover, more is not necessarily better than less and vice versa. There are, rather, data collection methods that are more likely to reach data saturation than others” (Fusch & Ness,
Chapter 5 is about my curiosity as a researcher and my ethical commitment to bring to this study the “embodied” emotions and complexities that ethnography is able to capture (Ellingson, 2017). It centers my work within critical feminism as it brings to the forefront the voices and photographs of ten Muslim girls who share the experience of displacement and the “refugee” label. The chapter provides a rich review of photovoice, the process and the findings. It offers the narratives of belonging, religion, home, trauma, survival, youth and hope through what these girls’ camera lenses have captured.

My extensive field work provided me with the opportunity to re-think my methods and move beyond what I hear and decide to listen to. It was important to engage with a visual participatory method to make sense of what I believe a feminist ethnography should look like. The multiple facets of the participants’ identity negotiations, the complexities of their lives, the different subjective experiences they live and how their religion intersects with gender, race, socio-economic status, place of birth cannot only be captured through interviews or focus groups; there was a need to move beyond the verbal and bring the participants’ perspectives through a visual medium that would eventually engage the academy and public.

The following chapters present multiple portraits, narratives and reflections on being Muslim and becoming Canadian. I acknowledge that my study is far from being “done”. I had to leave the field, write my dissertation, exit the lives of my participants, but this is just a momentary academic necessity. I am not sure I have done enough, but I am sure that I am not thinking of an exit yet, as “if ethnographic research is an iterative combination of disciplined curiosity and unexpected insight, any endpoint is arbitrary, there may not be a ‘last goodbye’” (Mills & Morton, 2017, p. 2).
This work is about stories, multiple stories that are not meant to generalize what it means to be Muslim from different embodied life experiences. Telling stories is powerful and empowering, and this work is meant to trouble the dominant “single story” of Muslim women and men, remembering the words of Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie that “the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story” (Adichie, 2009).
Chapter 2: Theoretical contestations: Cartographies of identity, home and belonging in multicultural Canada

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents first, theoretical frameworks used by Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha to challenge essentialist notions of culture and identity that abound in both intercultural and multicultural education. Next, drawing on Paulston’s (2000) methodology of social cartography, it opens discussions about scripts of identity and alterity that can be seen at work in different forms of intercultural, multicultural, or other forms of education at different points in time, in different contexts. We, Andreotti and I, focus specifically on the role of language in creating, negotiating or contesting imposed, inherited and self-authored identities. In the last part, we present separate situated narratives of seeking homes beyond borders.

2.2 Bhabha and Hall on culture and identity

We use the works of Bhabha and Hall to affirm a definition of culture as the dynamic production of meaning in a context of incommensurable demands, rather than a fixed and essentializing category grounded in narratives of territoriality, origin and/or originality. Hall (1993) argues that “the essentializing moment is weak because it naturalizes and dehistoricizes difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological, and genetic” (p. 111). Hall suggests a nuanced definition of identity as multiple and situational, a product of different encounters and experiences, in contrast with fixed definitions used in both colonial and anti-colonial movements:

Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere
‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (Hall, 1990, p. 225)

This suggests a conceptualization of identity not as an essence, but as a representation, a continuous, unfinished performance that requires a performer and an audience where the two are in “mutual and mutable” relationship (Bhabha, 1994).

Hall’s definition is effective in capturing the constant play of identity. He asserts that identity …is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (p. 394)

Identity, for Hall, is characterized by change and constant transformation as it is the production of the intersections of past and present histories with the current position and context. It is also shaped by others and how they see us, because “without the others there is no self, there is no self-recognition” (Hall, 1995, p. 8). Hall challenges the essentialized notion of identity, which is perceived to be “the folly of Enlightenment humanism” (Torres & Kyriakides, 2012). In his view, identity is seen as contingent and produced by (or the result of) a dynamic negotiation of differences within social hierarchies (of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, ability, etc.) in a respective context, Hall contends that identities are “increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (Hall, 1996, p. 17). His conceptualization questions the
search for authentic identities by affirming that identities are “subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (Hall, 1990, p. 225).

Similarly, Bhabha’s articulation of cultural identity is based on the idea that “all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity” (Bhabha, 1994; Rutherford, 1990, p. 211). He focuses particularly on colonizer/colonized relations, stressing their interdependence and mutual construction. For Bhabha (1994), cultural identity always emerges in a contradictory and ambivalent “third space of enunciation” (p. 37). Bhabha illustrates that the colonial encounter produces hybridization in “new forms of knowledge, new modes of differentiation, new sites of power” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 120; see also Souza and Andreotti, 2009; Souza, 2004). Hence, hybridity can be conceptualized as a form of resistance that “is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the simple negation or exclusion of the ‘content’ of another culture” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 110). The hybrid identity is the identity that emerges out of the intersection between the colonizer and colonized identities, and it is the articulation of the transformation of both of them, so it is not the original, authentic identity nor the colonial identity” (Bhabha, 2006). Hybridity happens in between the two spaces and eventually creates a third space where the colonial subjects are no longer the “original” colonized nor the “replication of the colonizer”. Further, Bhabha (1994) argues that the recognition of the third space would create a new culture that is not based on exoticism, creating a counter-gaze that effectively displaces power.

Although the works of Hall and Bhabha produce an invigorating challenge to traditional formulations of identity that are based on Enlightenment thinking, their critique can also be perceived as problematic in certain contexts. For example, in settler-Indigenous relations, discourses of hybridity have been used ambivalently as a justification for assimilation and further
dispossession. Like any theory or set of propositions, Bhabha’s and Hall’s ideas emerge in a specific problem space, with specific questions, and they create further problems in different political contexts. However, their contributions also enable us to take a step back and look at a variety of narratives of identity and interculturality very differently, and this is what I focus on in this chapter. If culture is a dynamic production of meaning, the production of meaning about culture is also dynamic and located in a context of incommensurable demands. Seen in this way, it is possible to create a narrative of different constructions of culture and identity within the “culture” of the field of intercultural education. Thus, in the next section, drawing on Paulston’s (2000) methodology of social cartography, I present a situated map of four positionalities related to intercultural engagements between a specific notion of self and a specific notion of Other, which engender different types of intercultural education.

2.3 Mapping the politics of intercultural positionings

The four positionalities presented in this section (see also Andreotti, 2014a; 2014b) are inter-related and have developed in relation to one another, but they do not exist on a level playing field; they are also situated within and respond to conjectural political demands in their own contexts. We briefly outline basic assumptions for each positionality and offer a summary of priorities and implied types of intercultural education that each can generate. I use the letters A, B, C, and D to refer to the positionalities without implying a hierarchy of value. I do not assume that this cartography refers to all possible positionalities either. We believe that this map may help clarify our own positionalities explained in two different voices in the second part of this chapter.
Positionality A, common in colonial and neocolonial relationships, projects a negative and fixed mis-identity onto the “Other” to construct a positive and fixed mis-identity of the self in ways that justify dominance/subjugation and concentrations of power/privilege (Bhabha, 1994). This concentration of power/privilege is rationalized as an entitlement based on merit. This merit is validated through a social hierarchy where those in a position to define meaning and with control over resources are considered to be in a more advanced state of civilization/education/development and to be heading humanity towards a seamless and teleological (often racially defined, hetero-normative, patriarchal, able-bodied, and class marked) idea of progress. This construction necessarily requires the construction of the “Other” as lacking civilization/education/development, “dragging” humanity, and slowing progress down. This positionality has been criticized by several authors (see for example Andreotti, 2011a; Battiste, 2000; Shields, et al., 2005; Willinsky, 1999).

This historical and systemic pattern of over-humanization of self (e.g. in terms of intellectual, rational, technological and organizational capacity) and dehumanization of Others, whose difference is perceived as a deficit, is based on an ambivalent logic constructed to justify cultural supremacy where the Other is potentially equal, but necessarily inferior (Bhabha, 1994). This ambivalence frames potential equality as a threat to the narrative of superiority of the self and triggers the anxious repetition of a chain of (also ambivalent) stereotypes about the Other and stories of originality, origination, and purity of the self (and the community where it is inserted) in an attempt to eliminate the threat of ambiguity and justify dominance and inequalities (ibid). Therefore, knowledge about the Other is used to pathologize difference (Bishop et al., 2005) and to maintain domination, where “knowing” the Other is a precondition for controlling the Other and maintaining the status quo (Gandhi, 1998).
An intercultural education deployed from this positionality would focus on a form of “knowing” the Other that fixes her into an ambivalent chain of stereotypes that serve to re-center the self as a universal knower and dispenser of help. For example, the Other can be “creative” in weaving beautiful baskets, but still needs to catch up in terms of education and economic development. The Other has “values and traditions”, but still needs to acquire knowledge and literacies of global worth. Thus, benevolence towards the Other is a trait of the (superior) self and is absolutely necessary to provide solutions to achieve the potential of humanity. Within this logic, privilege is perceived (at best) to mobilize a responsibility for the Other, where the self is perceived as part of the solution to the problems of inequality created by the deficit of the Other, rather than as an integral part of the problem. At worst, privilege is perceived as an entitlement that is under threat, which has the potential to create justifications for genocidal violence.

Positionality B is a slightly modified version of A (deployed in liberal-humanist narratives) that recognizes and foregrounds the problem of structural inequalities but downplays (or denies) the problem of epistemic violence and hegemonic dominance as the cause of structural inequalities (Andreotti, 2011a; Souza, 2004; Taylor, 2011). It attempts to eliminate the pathologization of difference as the source of the exclusion of the Other by eliminating difference itself and by emphasizing sameness. As hegemonic dominance is not recognized as a problem, this position projects the self onto the Other through paternalistic and salvationist ideas of inclusion and integration (into a norm already pre-defined, but not evident to those within it). This position may challenge class, gender, sex, race and ability marked forms of exclusion, but it does not question or problematize the historical violence of that which people want to be included into (e.g. civilization/ education/ development represented in the Nation-State, the school, modern metropolitan-consumerist society) (Andreotti, 2011b).
The effort deployed in intercultural education from this positionality is for the (dominant) system to become more flexible and more hospitable in order to welcome an Other who wants to “be the same”. However, this sameness is not an equality of capacity (for decisions or contributions) but of (projected) shared needs and aspirations: The Other is expected to value our social consensus, to aspire to be the same as us and to take part in “our” community (fundamentally) on our terms. If their comfort requires “us” to make accommodations for tolerable differences, or even appreciate them as colorful assets (e.g. ethnic foods, some forms of clothing, religious practices, music and arts), we will be doing our part. Therefore, knowledge about the Other emphasizes sameness over differences (which are seen as superficial): the other is represented as a mirror of the self (and whatever does not fit the mirror is either ignored or abhorred). However, this also opens up the way for redistribution through recognition enacted in “inclusion” (as a quick fix) of a packaged dish of diversity, cooked to order, where the Other is palatable and “allowed” to keep and even share his/her culture as long as relationships of dominance and shared aspirations for sameness are not significantly challenged (see Andreotti, 2011a; Dei and Caliste, 2000; May and Sleeter, 2010; Wright, 2012).

Positions A and B are perceived by position C to misrepresent the reality of the Other through the construction of inauthentic knowledge and the use of force to prohibit the political sovereignty and freedom of the Other to represent her/himself (see for example Said, 1978; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). In other words, in (neo)colonial relationships characterized by hegemony, ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, and paternalism (see Andreotti, 2012), the Other is accorded a negative/lower (mis)identity (which is often internalized) and denied the right to self-representation and self-determination. As a response to this problem, position C proposes the emancipation of the Other (from domination) through the defiance or reversal of the hierarchy of
values attributed to difference. This is done by placing an emphasis on the right to signify one’s own (positive and fixed) strategically self-determined collective identity (see Cannella & Viruru, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Prakash, Esteva and Watson, 2008).

In the type of intercultural education that emerges from this positionality, creating knowledge about “Others” becomes politically incorrect as a progressive attitude requires opening spaces so that Others (who have been racialized, subjugated and discriminated against) can speak for themselves, often on behalf of their communities. This position is framed to justify reclamation of power/privilege as reparation, rationalized as resistance and as entitlement based on retributive justice. As this position is a reaction to (and is therefore conditioned by) the material and symbolic victimization, suffering and vulnerability (created as an effect of the dominance and mis-representation of positions A and B), it is often assumed that the only legitimate knowledge that can be produced about conditions of oppression is the knowledge produced by the oppressed who have been “emancipated” from the internalization of imposed mis-representations (Freire, 1976). The implication is that any outsider representation is perceived to be inauthentic and potentially epistemically violent (i.e. reproducing patterns of domination or appropriation). Therefore, knowledge about the Other (produced by the Other herself) is supposed to represent the Other authentically and objectively (see Spivak, 1988, for a postcolonial critique of subaltern voice).

Positionality D reacts to the problems (of essentialism) created by positionality C drawing on poststructuralist and anti-essentialist insights. In this positionality, culture and identity are perceived as situated social constructions rather than representations of an objective reality (like in A, B, and C). Positionality D prioritizes a critique of collective narratives of identity by highlighting the discursive hybridity and heterogeneity at the core of any form of
identity and community construction, emphasizing the dogmatic and coercive limitations of essentialism, in order to dismiss it as an epistemological error (Scott, 1999). This position promotes (anti-essentialist) individual narratives of fluid, multiple and fragmented identities of complex and contingently discursively situated individuals and communities (see for example Dion, 2007, Youdell, 2011).

The type of intercultural education created by positionality D emphasizes dynamic narratives of multiplicity and fluidity, placing its emphasis on juxtaposed identities and (less often) the discursive and material forces that condition the construction of these identities. For example, educators working from this positionality would be interested in how immigrant children negotiate between, articulate and respond to different cultural expectations from home, from school, and from their social groups in terms of demands for compliance and subordination, as well as possibilities of resistance. Educators would possibly involve the children themselves in analyses of their own subjectivity formation, tracing influences, conflicts and paradoxes, and developing vocabularies that could support re-negotiations. Intercultural education in this sense would be based on our shared condition as individuals exposed to multiple discourses having to negotiate conflictual and contingent demands framed by historical circumstances.

Positionalities A and B are still prevalent in society and in education. Therefore, strategically, positionality C still offers a viable political response for subjugated groups because it focuses precisely on power relations and speaks through dominant modes of (antagonistic) communicative engagement and representative political processes, especially in discourses of equity. In this sense, positionality D does not offer intelligible political answers for the problem of systemic oppression, subjugation and disadvantage, although it may be more effective than C in helping individuals negotiate the complexity of their lived realities. Positionality D sometimes
lends itself to a sole focus on self-authored scripts of identity. When it does so, it risks evading historically and collectively defined unequal flows of power and possibilities of signification, inadvertently depoliticizing the debate, and individualizing identity, which serves and supports neoliberal forms of subjectivity making.

In the next section we offer two auto-ethnographic (Spry, 2001) narratives of our engagement with these positionalities as markedly racialized immigrants, as well as teachers and researchers involved with intercultural education in multiple countries in the “Western world”. Auto-ethnography is used to connect the personal to the cultural and to make visible the link between the subject and the social (Denzin, 2003). We decided to write our narratives in response to the question “Where is home?” As “visible minorities”, we are often asked this question implicitly or explicitly when local people perceive that we visibly “do not belong” in their imaginary of the polity of a place. On the other hand, this is also a question that we ask ourselves, possibly every time we are overcome with either the joy of making homely a space that was once “foreigner”, or the pain of being made a foreigner in a space that we wish to make home. Using auto-ethnography allows us to capture the duality of “here” and “there” (Spry, 2001) and through our reflexive tales we are seeking ‘home’ in different ways and through multiple experiences.

2.4 Where’s home? Neila’s response

Exploring my identity in the West and in Canada in particular cannot be addressed without exploring Canadian multiculturalism as a framework that defines who we are. The way multiculturalism is defined in Canada recognizes cultural pluralism, boasts the celebration of diversity, and promotes ethno-cultural retention. It tries to “foster appreciation of the cultural
heritages of others toward increasing intergroup harmony” (Lund, 2006, p. 39). It “celebrates” cultures, “tolerates” difference and “recognizes” diversity.

Canadian multiculturalism is founded on the confinement of the Others in their particular cultural enclaves as captives of their reified cultures often referred to as “traditional”, not to say “backward”. It is a strategy to determine central identity and peripheral identities and how the relationship between them should be presented in a dichotomous terminology like Canadian versus immigrant, home versus home country, Canadian culture versus multicultural, “first world” versus “third world”. This approach focuses on cultural diversity and ignores how power and status operate in the larger society. It relies on a carnival style of ethnic diversity performance. The representation of the culture of the other is often characterized by stereotypes and a deficit perspective. Not only does this distinctive language of identity control the power dynamics between the mainstream identity and the marginal ones, but it also enhances the marginalized groups’ sense of unbelonging and the reproduction of hegemonic discourses of cultural and ethnic collective identity. It is an approach that perceives “identity is latent destiny. Seen or unseen, on the surface of the body or buried deep in its cells, identity forever sets one group apart from others who lack the particular, chosen traits that become the basis of typology and comparative evaluation” (Gilroy, 2000, p. 104).

This form of multiculturalism enacts positionality B, presented above, as diversity is welcome as long as it is domesticated and managed so that it does not pose a challenge to the dominant order. Trivialized difference is reduced to the exotic taste of food and the colorful costumes of distant places, in fact, Canadian multiculturalism is famous for “the newspaper photos of parades with colourfully costumed performers in ‘ethnic dress’, the collage of diverse faces in the ‘Canadian family tree’ adorning the covers of government publications; and the
displays of ethnic and fusion dishes in magazine food features” (Lacovetta, 2009, p. 16). This dominant Western, and arguably colonial, essentialist view turns Other identities into museum objects; silent, outdated and dead. Seyla ben Habib (1999) contends that “this essentialist view is not only politically but also sociologically impoverished: the view of cultures as seamless wholes, absorbed by their members without interpretation and contestation, resistance and transformation belong to the prehistory of social theory” (p. 405). This view can lead to a practice where educators “look at human beings and see not human beings but statistical ciphers with black skin or red skin or white skin, or male or female anatomy: to be counted, proportioned, dictated to, indoctrinated, and moved about by force” (p. 452).

Within the Canadian multicultural framework, I can’t find myself, it is hard to feel comfortable. I can’t be who I am at this moment at this place. It is a perspective that reduces me to a member of one visible minority as my veil unveils my religion and my “original” cultural background and puts me in a stereotyped limited cultural framework. With my veil that unveils my faith, I am always the Other; my visibly marked clothing has a specific representation in the West. Being a visibly Muslim woman, crossing borders and choosing to live in the West have made me face the complexities of “Othering”. For Muslims it has never been easy to find “home” and after 9/11 “three allegorical figures have come to dominate the social landscape of the “War on Terror” and its ideological underpinning of a clash of civilizations: the dangerous Muslim man, the imperiled Muslim woman, and the civilized European” (Razack, 2008, p. 5). My veil locates me within the boundaries of one specific, static and unchanging identity prototype and as part of a monolithic group, thus annihilating the multiple experiences that have (re)shaped who I am. With my veil, I am the “Other”; the immigrant not the “real” Canadian,
because Canadian culture presents itself as Western, Christian and White, by default (Bannerji, 2000), I am also the “third world” woman, coming from a small country in North Africa; I am from the global South, and I am located “in terms of the underdevelopment, oppressive traditions, high illiteracy, rural and urban poverty, religious fanaticism, and ‘overpopulation’ of particular Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American countries” (Mohanty, 1991, p. 5). I can be Tunisian-Canadian, a Muslim-Canadian, but there is no chance to be just Canadian. Like all non-European immigrants, I live on hyphenated identities (Sirin & Finn, 2008) and like all non-European immigrants my “Canadianness” remains questioned and I have to answer the famous question: “Q: What nationality are you? R: ‘Canadian.’ Q: No, I mean, what nationality are you really?” (Bissoondath, 1994, p. 111).

The answer to Who am I?
is not easy or simple
I am hybrid,
I am transnational,
I am diasporic,
I am multicultural, multilingual, multi-citizen,
I am in-between,
I am here-and-there,
I am in a third space,
I am displaced,
I am liminal,
I am ambivalent,
I am fluid in constant negotiations…

“Identity” can’t be understood without recognizing all these interwoven dimensions of my life. In this sense, how can I restrict myself to a “home” I have left for twenty-five years? How can I be denied belonging to a place I chose to be “home”? I was perplexed until my 10-year-old son said, “Oh mommy, it is great to have two ‘homes’; I love them both; I want to have a vacation there and have school here.” My son’s innocent argument about here and there, his perception of
home in relation to him, his body and his choice seems to challenge the essentialist view of identity and belonging.

Thinking of myself and of my life experiences in my different homes, I feel a form of attachment to each of them in different ways, my transnational experience emphasizes Castells’ argument that “deterritorialization” (Castells, 2000), has created “transnational communities whose identities are not primarily based on attachment to a specific territory or specific cultural and ethnic identity” (p. 1157). My transnational experience has changed how I feel about “home”, my birthplace and home country is not home anymore. My “veil”, contrary to the stereotype of oppression, was not imposed on me, it is not a sign of oppression, it was my choice, and more than a religious symbol, it is a “conscious political gesture [and] a complex act of identification and defiance” (Benhabib, p. 103). I look at my young children, and so many children like them, who feel a strong attachment to this place, feel comfortable being Muslim, Tunisian, Canadian, speaking three languages and constructing their identities from multiple perspectives. I am concerned that they might lose this sense of belonging to where they are as they are going to realize the “binary” perspective of Here or There, Us or Them that dominates identity frameworks. This limited framework perceives identity as fixed and static and overshadows the power of schooling experiences and cultural globalization in (re)shaping youth identity (Rizvi, 2005). As I am reflecting on my positionality, I ruminate on my research participants and how they are positioned within Canadian multiculturalism.

Creating and recreating identities is a developmental task of adolescence in general, but for young Muslim adolescents the task is much harder and more complex. Because Muslim teens are “teens who carry international crises in their backpacks and in their souls” (Sirin & Fine, 2007, p. 151), they are embodying multiple conflicts and contradictions and have to struggle
daily to survive within a global context of Islamophobia that represents them as an “insider threat,” “terrorists,” and possible “traitors” (Abu-El Haj, 2007; Stonebacks & Sensoy (2009); Zine, 2001; 2012).

Muslim identity in the West is shaped by Western representational systems, with their stereotypes and cultural and racial discourses. Surviving these complexities is becoming harder and more acute for the new generations of Muslims in Canada. Shanaz Khan (2002) captures this reality when she explains that within this third space, “Muslim subjectivity is no longer about an identity politics making claims about absolute knowledge boxed in rigid boundaries, an identity that a few can control (such as Islamists) and others can vilify (such as Orientalists)” (p. xvi).

Who Am I? It is quite interesting for (me) to reach a moment where answering that question is not as obvious as it used to be twenty years ago. Crossing borders, inhabiting new spaces and adapting to new lives are making a new “me”. Speaking about identity is speaking about my multiple identities; how can crossing borders shape the person who I am now? How can new places become home? How can home become “nowhere else but right here, at the edge of this body of mine” (Minn-Ha, 2011, p. 12)? We move and we change places and we therefore change ourselves. We become different… but also the same …Who am I? If I am on the move, seeking home beyond borders… Positionality D seems like an appropriate answer to the challenges I have faced in this journey, but I acknowledge that it may have very different implications in other cultural struggles.

2.5 Where’s home? Vanessa’s response

My engagements with the question of “home” have always been ambivalent. This is partly due to the constitution of my mixed-heritage family tree, where different marriages re-
enact different colonial encounters. In the case of my parents, it was an encounter between
Europeans (German) migrating to Brazil fleeing World War persecutions, and Indigenous
“Brazilian” (Guarani) populations who have been victims of constant land dispossession and
genocide. There are three strong narratives of mobility related to this history. In the context of
forced war-related inter- and intra-national migration of German nationals, narratives of mobility
are constructed in the family as imposed “displacement”. In the context of Indigenous peoples’
struggles in Brazil, narratives of mobility are constructed both as a natural form of nomad
existence and as a form of dispossession and destitution. The three narratives of mobility are
narratives of survival “on the go”.

In my personal life, these narratives have created competing desires and aspirations. A
part of me is tired of imposed mobility and aspires for a home in order to rest in a predictable and
unchanging environment grounded in dreams of peaceful belonging, stability, control and
perpetual happiness. The irony has been that my “home country” rarely felt like a place where
this could be achieved. Another part of me has sought home in a very different way, possibly
motivated by the insights of nomad ancestors. This part has questioned all types of borders and
boundaries (e.g. geographical, political, religious, cognitive, affective, relational, physical and
temporal), in search of a “home” in the metaphysical sense of the word.

I will address both searches in my response in this section. I will call the first a “political”
search for a home: I use the term “political” not in the sense of party politics or ideology, but in
terms of my belonging or un-belonging in publics primarily defined by the institution of the
nation state and by representational forms of governance. The second search for a home, I will
call “existential” in the sense that it is concerned with questions of existence and its purpose
within and beyond one embodied life. In other words, the political home search refers to the act
of choosing to participate in institutions, forms of organization and narratives of self and of the world, while the existential home search refers to what defines our lives and reduces and/or expands our possibilities of existence. For each home search, I offer a poem that articulates its questions and priorities.

My political search has been shaped by experiences in five different countries, apart from the country where I was born and raised (Brazil), namely England, Ireland, New Zealand, Finland and Canada, each of which had a different way of constructing notions of immigration and immigrant identities, which mostly represented positionalities A, B and C described before. Hospitality and possibilities of belonging in each of these contexts were dependent on a number of different factors. The two most important factors were the level of historical exposure to difference through immigration, and social-historical and political circumstances. For example, in relation to the former, the type of hospitality and accommodation possible in England, a country with a long history of immigration (and imperialism and colonialism), was very different from Finland, a country with a very recent history of immigration (and a complex history of colonialism). This meant that, in general, it seemed easier to address issues of ethnocentrism in England as people were more likely to be familiar with discussions related to pluralities of definitions, and the needs and aspirations of a very diverse population. On the other hand, social, historical and political events had the power to shift attitudes towards immigration and immigrants very quickly in both places. The narratives of terror (in England), “Third World” or “Islamic” invasion (in Finland), and economic crises and austerity (in both countries) have generated waves of reactionary xenophobic responses with extremely violent implications. The more vulnerable and disadvantaged the local population is made to feel, the more markedly racialized immigrants are scapegoated. Feasible forms of intercultural education are also
dependent on these external factors and shifts. In the countries where I have lived and worked, I have observed that positionality B was supported in times of perceived prosperity and abundance. In times of perceived austerity and vulnerability, positionality A tended to gain renewed strength.

Articulating how complex narratives of strangeness are conditioned by wider discourses, and how they are mobilized, interpreted and felt from different standpoints is not an easy task. Often what is expressed by dominant groups carries with it an implicit meaning that denotes a different message. For example, messages of welcome may convey implicit specific conditions of entrance – the fine print that only those with the right language and literacy can ‘read’. In my political home search, and in my practice as an academic and educator, examining these implicit articulations has been key to my work. The poem “Brutal Kindness” presented at the end of this article, was written as a response to racially motivated fatal incidents in Finland in 2012. It articulates some of the paradoxes of messages of conditional welcome framed by a combination of racialized and economic discourses. The poem was written to highlight the projection of social hierarchies and ideals of progress (of positionality B) that make the promise of home an impossible promise within the confines of our contemporary political history and modern institutions.

We welcome you in our nation
Our borders open only to a few
We ask for nothing in return, except
That you recognize the deepest wisdom
That when in Rome, you must pay tribute to the Romans

Therefore, you must
speak our language
admire our deeds
share our dreams
obey our laws
respect our rules
embrace our values
fulfill our expectations
mimic our behavior
praise our talents
strengthen our economy
aspire to be like us
commit to staying here
dedicate your life to serving our people
and be thankful for our efforts to help you…

Similar to what Neila mentioned, as I was wrestling with these issues, I also observed that the experience of “being made a stranger” abroad made expatriates look very differently at their countries of birth. In my engagements with expatriate communities, and also in observing the experience of my own children negotiating expectations of identity (see Andreotti, 2011), I could observe patterns and periods of rejection (desire for assimilation in the host country), romanticization (nostalgia in relation to an idealized and essentialized “home” culture), dual celebration (wanting the “best of both worlds”), and dual critique (comparing problems in both countries). My own experience of expatriation also implied a different kind of exposure that made me also more of a “stranger” in my return to a “home” community. After visits to Brazil where I felt I was no longer completely familiar with its values, narratives and expectations, I sometimes felt like “going home” as I was leaving Brazil, but this feeling often disappeared as soon as the plane started its descent in the host country, which was obviously not home. The family joke was that “home” was being on the move.

These experiences made me pay more attention to the existential home search – to questions that had been with me all along, but that only tended to surface in specific moments. My mother recalls they were expressed very early on, as soon as I could speak: “Why am I here?
Where did I come from? Why does it feel so strange being in this body? What happens with me if this body dies? I think there was a delivery mistake, can you take me back?” With more “embodied” experience, the main educational questions became: “How can I make this body and this planet a home? What makes us believe we are separate from everything else? What is preventing us from noticing we are connected with each other? Why can’t we recognize or honor this connection?” Very rarely have I encountered similar questions in the field of education, but one of these rare examples was articulated by Jacqui Alexander (2006) in the book, *Pedagogies of Crossings*. Alexander uses the metaphor of dismemberment to explain the implications of socially constructed divisions:

[...]since colonisation has produced fragmentation and dismemberment at both the material and psychic levels, there is a yearning for wholeness, often expressed as a yearning to belong, a yearning that is both material and existential, both psychic and physical, and which, when satisfied, can subvert, and ultimately displace the pain of dismemberment. (p. 281)

She suggests that strategies of membership in coalitions, like those of citizenship, community, family, political movement, nationalism and solidarity in identity, tribe or ideology, although important, have not addressed the source of this yearning. By re-enacting divisions, these coalitions have reproduced the very fragmentation and separation that Alexander identifies as the root of the problem. She states that the source of this yearning is a “deep knowing that we are in fact interdependent – neither separate, nor autonomous” (p. 282), not self-sufficient, but insufficient.
As human beings we have a sacred connection to each other, and this is why enforced separations wreak havoc in our Souls. There is a great danger then, in living lives of segregation. Racial segregation. Segregation in politics. Segregated frameworks. Segregated and compartmentalised selves. What we have devised as an oppositional politics has been necessary, but it will never sustain us, for a while it may give us some temporary gains (which become more ephemeral the greater the threat, which is not a reason not to fight), it can never ultimately feed that deep place within us: that space of the erotic, that space of the Soul, that space of the Divine. (p. 282)

Ultimately, my home search is a search for that space within us that Alexander is talking about. This place is not framed by political identities or social hierarchies, but by a sense of entanglement. This sense of entanglement is not mediated by knowledge or understanding of self-centered and knowledge-empowered individuals, as most education affirms, but by an experience of something larger than the self. This involves a sense of “being” beyond “knowing” that leads to a positionality of disarmament, strength in vulnerability and self-de-centering. Different from positionality D, this requires a conceptualization of self and Other both as ultimately “un-narrativisable” (Andreotti, 2014), in other words, who we are, our existence, exceeds what can be described in inherited or self-authored “scripts”. This displaces the idea that we need to ‘know’ each other in order to be able to relate to each other (a very strong assumption of positionalities A, B and C grounded in Cartesian thought). This new positionality affirms we are always already in relationship with a world that is plural and “undefinable” (Biesta, 2013). It evokes a sense of wonder, reverence and respect before the Other, before the world.
On the other hand, this existential home search does not preclude or substitute the political search that requires revisiting our collective past in order to transform possibilities in the present so that we can improve our chances for a shared fate in a different future, beyond the exploitative and unsustainable directions we have collectively inherited. If the two searches are brought together, they show that it is not a question of finding alternatives, but of an alternative way of thinking about alternatives that may give us a better chance of making different mistakes, of learning from failing together, and of enjoying the process of being taught by our failures and mistakes (Andreotti, 2012). This calls for a reframing of the questions that generate the need for intercultural education. My second poem “What if?” uses the metaphor of disease to capture the potential for a different kind of intercultural education that combines the political and the existential home searches.

… What if we have to learn to trust and love each other without guarantees?...

2.6 Conclusion

(In)Conclusion, we started this article by affirming a commitment to seeing culture and identity as a dynamic production of meaning. We first introduced this notion through the works of Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha. We then applied this understanding to educational discussions concerned with cultural difference by presenting a cartography of different dynamic conceptualizations of self and other that we have observed and examined in education. In the second part of the article, we offered two situated auto-ethnographies around the question “Where is home”. We hope that our personal narratives enact what we have tried to argue implicitly in this paper: that the experience of interculturality is an affective, cognitive and
performative process of negotiation, constrained and enabled by configurations of history, silences, traumas, power relations, framed within political and existential dimensions of complex lives lived in complex contexts. In this sense, we have argued for educational directions that enable people to examine the historical and political genealogy of our “disconnectedness” so that we may start to relate with each other beyond the current need for fixed scripts of identity.
Chapter 3: Methodological choices and the dilemmas of ethnographic research: Reflexive notes on critical ethnography, positionality and representation

3.1 Introduction: Mapping the terrain

Doing research with Muslim youth is rather challenging at this time of global terrorism, radicalization, islamophobia and racism and at this time of enhanced securitization and enforced silencing. A research that asks how school experiences impact Muslim youth identity negotiations and their sense of belonging in the West is very timely, but is also a minefield, contoured by several dilemmas, particularly when the researcher is positioned as an insider, a “Muslim”. This paper emerges from my methodological “panic attacks” as I embark on a difficult research journey. In this paper, I conceptualize my ethnographic adventure; I explain my choice of critical ethnography, clarify its complexities and reflect on its different “dangers, seen, unseen, and unforeseen” (Milner IV, 2007, p. 387). I also reflect on the different ethnographic concepts and how they impact my research. Being a Muslim and doing research with/about/for Muslim youth does entail a lot of complexities and it especially pushes me to question my engagement with critical ethnography, reflexivity, positionality and representation. This paper reports on my reflexive reflections on my first six months in the field of my project of a two-year ethnography.
3.2 Why critical ethnography?

My engagement with critical ethnography emanates from the political and critical dimensions that this research is embracing. The decision to engage with critical ethnography to explore how school experiences impact Muslim youth identity negotiations and sense of belonging was initially triggered by both personal reasons and academic ones; first, the fear of a mother whose two Muslim teenage children are attending public schools; second, the overwhelming negative accounts of how schools and schooling impact Muslim youth in Canada (see Helly, 2004; Zine, 2001), and third the paucity of ethnographic research with Muslim youth in Canada, especially in Western Canada. I argue that there is no better way than ethnography to have a sense of what experiences Muslim youth encounter in their schools and to be immersed in the daily school lives of the participants.

I started my research thinking of my endeavour as a process of liberation, freeing me from my fears; this liberation requires that I use “critique” (Foucault 1997) as a systematic process to be reflexive on my choices. I also had to be cautious and aware of my “ethnographic subjectivity” (Berry 2011). Since I started thinking about my research question, I have been thinking of methodological choices as creative processes rather than methodological recipes.

One of the hardest tasks is to define critical ethnography and set its boundaries; this is not strange because critical ethnography has “multiple” origins (Anderson, 1989; Carspecken, 1996; Lather, 2001; Noblit, et al., 2004). It represents a research orientation that emerged out of frustration as the functionalist/structuralist and Marxist/critical structuralist approaches failed to capture the role of agency and resistance; consequently, critical ethnography emerged to address the structure-agency debates (Carspecken, 2002). Lather (2001) highlights the multidisciplinary character of critical ethnography, in contending that
it is rooted in the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, the sociolinguistics of Basil Bernstein and the British cultural studies of the Birmingham School, has attachments to local knowledges and to illuminating the exercise of power in culturally specific yet socially reproductive processes. Re-working Marx after Gramsci, Althusser and Foucault, as well as a rich profusion of feminisms, post-colonialisms and critical race theories. (p. 479)

3.2.1 Critical ethnography: The contested terrain of emancipation

Within the plethora of definitions, scholars, despite their epistemological differences, agree on the political dimension in critical ethnography. Patti Lather (2001) also argues that critical ethnography is “breaking with conventional ethnographic practices of detachment, its particular interest is activist collaboration with oppressed groups” (p. 479). These definitions explain that my choice of critical ethnography is embedded in my concern with the power dynamics that control the lives and school experiences of Muslim youth and my political engagement to challenge inequality and oppression. This political dimension is the reason that critical ethnography “can never be innocent, nor neutral, since it is embedded in a political and moral process” (Murillo 2004, p. 155), as it adds a political or transformative lens that challenges the status quo in some way. With critical ethnography, my research engages with “Conscientization” (Freire 1973); as a researcher, I seek to know but also to transform the lived oppressive reality of the participants (Lather 1986). This perspective implies that critical ethnography should enable the participants to become conscious of the oppressive systems and of ways to challenge them. It is particularly important to emphasize that “through their analysis or actions in the field, critical ethnographers hope to free the oppressed or at least to contribute in some way to their emancipation” (Gunzenhauser, 2004, p. 77). With the understanding that critical ethnography requires political consciousness and longs for emancipating the participants, my worries started as I am aware that I would be so naïve to think that I can easily
overcome the power dynamics that would define, regulate and control my voice as a Muslim researcher by just choosing critical ethnography. I am aware of the limitations of my “voice” as a Muslim researcher coming out of the Third world into the First world (Mohanty, 2003). I am also aware of the colonial legacy of ethnography and the image of the expert “civilized” researcher, getting into the field to liberate the “backward” natives (Clair, 2003; Madison, 2005; Lather, 2001), and the ethical dilemmas that the ethnographer encounters, such as appropriation, mis/representation, and oppression (Alcoff, 1991; Chaudhry, 1997; Gonzales, 2003; Madison, 2005).

While working through the long and exhausting process of my institutional ethics review, I realized that my research can have the potential to harm my participants, and that my good intentions have to be reflected on, especially since I am doing my research with a “vulnerable” group. They are minors aged 14 to 19 years old and most of them are refugees, come from a low economic class and have limited English language skills.

I acknowledge that working with youth with an “emancipatory” mission in mind confronted me with an ethical question: “Do my participants need emancipation?” and if they need it, will my research reflect the way they think would work best for them? Most of my participants came as refugees to Canada from war-torn countries (e.g. Syria, Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan); they have witnessed and endured horrendous conditions to reach Canada. When they were telling me their stories of survival in the refugee camps and the dangerous routes they took with their families, I came to realize that I should be questioning the discourses of “emancipation” as I felt so vulnerable claiming the power of “empowering” them. I had to confront myself with the underpinning power dynamics of ethnography, especially when conducting research with minority communities and youth. This debate of power relations has been discussed and still takes a central importance in
ethnographic research. A long time ago, Zinn (1979) warned that “the relationship between social researchers and the people they study has been unequal at best and exploitative at worst” (p. 209). The fear of exploitation pushed me to query if my research has the danger of being an “invasive stretch of surveillance” (Lather, 2001, p. 483). Will my research function to spy on Muslims and report on them? Muslims in the West have been under enhanced surveillance to monitor their “radical” intentions and significant funding is created to “monitor” Muslims, and to detect their “terrorist intentions”.

When I started my field work, and started socializing with Muslim students in the school, I was asked several times if my research was for the government and if it was done because of the problem of “terrorism” or because of the Syrian refugee crisis and its impact on Canada. I was not sure about the right answer to give. My research is funded by a government research agency, but it was never intended to be a surveillance tool (Foucault, 1980) or a refugee settlement plan. Parents showed different attitudes that extended from certain feelings of discomfort and hesitance in allowing their children to take the risk of talking to me all the way to a strong advocacy for the research. Several times I was asked about the purpose of my research; I was confronted with the fact that “empowerment” is my purpose not the participants’ choice. I had to question my purpose and reflect on my ethical commitments towards my participants, and I felt comfortable with the idea that “empowering” them can be done by presenting their voices and telling their stories the way they want since doing critical ethnography “entails four promises - giving voice, uncovering power, identifying agency, and connecting analysis to cultural critique” (Gunzenhauser, 2004, p. 77). I acknowledge that I am bringing a political agenda to my research. I am conducting this research because I am one of the researchers “who are concerned with social justice issues and inequities” (Dennis, 2009, p. 131), but I became cautious of the “emancipatory” dimension in
critical ethnography. How can this work be framed from a critical framework, questioning the
different articulations and meanings of “critical”, “empowerment” and “emancipation”? How can I
engage with my research without appropriating the voices of my participants and without
exploiting them? How can I avoid the trap of turning my research into a surveillance tool? I also
echo Madison’s (2005) questions: “What are we going to do with the research and who ultimately
will benefit from it? Who gives us the authority to make claims about where we have been? How
will our work make a difference in people’s lives?” (p. 7). Thinking of how sensitive my research
is and how it can impact not only the participants’ lives but also the image of a whole community
that is already under suspicion, I engage with “reflective practices as a way of thinking through
ethical practices” (Dennis, 2010, p. 124), especially when doing ethnography with communities
who are at risk in some social way, researchers must pay more attention to the special and the
unique potential effects of the research for vulnerable peoples and their communities (Dennis,
2010). Questioning my power to empower the participants has been a constant reflective practice
and a measure to monitor the passion that drives me and the high expectations I encountered in the
field.

3.3 Reflexivity: The power of the self

My reflexivity is informed by the abundant body of literature that exists around
“reflexivity” in Social Sciences research and in particular from feminist perspectives (Davies,
2008; De Andrade, 2000; Patai, 1994; Villenas, 1996). Reflexivity has been extensively discussed
in anthropology, sociology and educational research. The continuum for reflexivity extends from
validating it as “methodological power” (Pillow, 2003) to questioning its legitimacy: “Does all this
self-reflexivity produce better research?” (Patai, 1994, p. 69). It has been articulated from different

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views, and has been contested, but there is no doubt that there is a consensus that we are witnessing “a reflexive turn” (Foley, 2002) in Social Sciences research. So, what does reflexivity mean? In her book, *Reflexive Ethnography*, Davies (2008) defines reflexivity as “a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference” (p. 7). She emphasizes the centrality of reflexivity in ethnography and highlights the omnipresence of the “Self” and how it impacts the different stages of the research process; in fact, Davies (2008) argues that

reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refers to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the personnel and process of doing research. These effects are to be found in all phases of the research process from initial selection of topic to final reporting of results”. (p. 4)

Davies’s definition shows that reflexivity in research is an active, ongoing process that is embedded in every stage of the research. As researchers, our multiple locations (social, political, cultural) infiltrate into and impact our research, from the moment we express our research interests to the moment we present our findings and celebrate our accomplishments. In line with De Andrade (2000), who argues that “attention has shifted to examining how the multiple roles and perspectives of the researcher shape the research process” (p. 270), I contend that researcher’s subjective experiences, perspectives, privileges, and oppression impact the research questions we ask, the questions we don’t ask, the theoretical framework we resonate with, the methodology we feel works best, the participants we decide to work with, the voices we include and the ones we exclude, the way we analyze our data, and the style we use to present it, all these reveal something about who we are, our values, our fears and what we want to say. In fact, “to be reflexive, then, not only contributes to producing knowledge that aids in understanding and gaining insight into the
workings of our social world but also provides insight on how this knowledge is produced” (Pillow, 2003, p. 178).

Reflexivity is to dig deep in who/what we are. “Directing one’s gaze at one’s own experience makes it possible to regard oneself as “other through a constant mirroring of the self, one eventually becomes reflexive about the situated, socially constructed nature of the self, and by extension, the other” (Foley, 2002, p. 473). So, reflexivity is a process that brings the researcher's self to the central stage and makes her/him visible. This visibility was hidden, feared and criticized by several educational ethnographers, who advocated for value-neutral research; objective, unbiased and apolitical research (see Hammersley, 1999).

I argue that in my ethnography, reflexivity has to take a central role in the research process, for ethnography depends on long-term immersion in the field which leads to more complex situations and the boundaries of researcher-researched relationships become blurry and confusing (Davies, 2008). In the case of my research, the messiness of the fieldwork with adolescents requires my constant reflective practices to maintain not only my institutional ethical guidelines but also my ethical commitment to the participants (Hemmings, 2009).

I engage with the “reflexivities of discomfort” (Pillow, 2003, p. 187); this reflexivity goes beyond “the familiar reflexivity” that still resides in the modernist discourses of self/other/truth, and is “normative, declarative” (Visweswaran, 1994, p. 78; cited in Pillow, 2003). It is the reflexivity that admits the (im)possibility of telling stories about the “other” without making sense of the contentious nature of the researcher’s stories (see Chaudhry, 2000). With postcolonial feminism, my reflexivity is embedded in “discomfort” to reflect on my positionality; my subjectivity, my identity(ies) and the power relations and the knowledge claims that are inherent in my research processes. As an ethnographer, I should be reflexive not only on the relationship
between theory and data and the reflection on the effects of the researcher's presence on the data collected, but should “integrate and systematize two other forms of reflection—self-reflection (i.e., reflection on the researcher's biases) and reflection on the dialectical relationship between structural/historical forces and human agency” (Anderson, 1989, p. 254). Drawing on Madison (2005), my reflexivity covers five major questions:

1. How do we reflect upon and evaluate our own purpose, intentions, and frames of analysis as researchers?
2. How do we predict consequences or evaluate our own potential to do harm?
3. How do we create and maintain a dialogue of collaboration in our research projects between ourselves and others?
4. How is the specificity of the local story relevant to the broader meanings and operations of the human condition?
5. How—in what location or through what intervention—will our work make the greatest contribution to equity, freedom, and justice? (pp. 4-5)

Since entering the field, I have been concerned with my intentions, my research purpose, the impact on the participants and how I maintain collaboration with them.

My reflexivity is a transformative process because it is turning in upon myself and it “should involve putting ourselves in tension with the historical and cultural forces that situate us in the world” (Chawla & Rodriguez, 2011, p. 80). It is a reflexivity that pushes me to examine my underlying knowledge of worldview as our worldviews are shaped by the communities in which we live, the people around us and those who are perceived to have the authority and the power to tell us of the nature of the world (Dillard, 2006). I entered the field cautious of the essentialist view of
“What” and “who” I am because “family, history, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and religion, among other distinctions, can be usefully woven into an ethnographic narrative, but only if they are not left self-evident as essentialized qualities that are magically synonymous with self-consciousness” (Robertson, 2002, p. 790); this means that we need to critically examine the story of our lives, dig deep into the historical, cultural, academic, racial and socio-economic circumstances and experiences that shaped who we are. This means that reflexivity would allow me to problematize my assigned “ready-to wear categories” (Robertson, 2002, p. 788). This form of reflexivity puts my research “authority” into question. As I am positioning myself as a feminist Muslim researcher, I am conscious of the critical questions I have to ask, such as How can I be reflexive on both my insiderness and outsiderness? How can I handle the narcissist subjective “self” that would impact and inform my research decisions? How can I resist the “orientalist” image of the Muslim woman in the Western imaginary without losing the self-critical lens that aims to unveil the patriarchal oppressive systems that impact Muslim women’s lives? How can I navigate academia and try opening new spaces where I can be Muslim, feminist, and a scholar who does not need to be saved (Abu-lughod, 2002), but one whose intellectual integrity needs to be taken seriously?

In the following section, I discuss two major issues related to my initial phase of fieldwork; my insider-outsider positionality in the field and the dilemma of representation.

3.4 Positionality: The insider-outsider continuum

Being reflexive is essential to engage with positionality, which “is fervently discussed in a wide range of post-positivist traditions from the interpretive/phenomenological research tradition, to the feminist camp, to the poststructuralist paradigm” (Choi, 2006, p. 436). It is theoretically
advanced by feminist researchers and then echoed by postcolonial researchers. Both call for a more transparent relationship between the researcher and the researched, where the researcher is reflecting on her/his intentions, status, cultural, historical and political “locations” and how they intersect with her/his research. It is important to differentiate between positionality and subjectivity, as the two concepts are different. In fact, Madison (2005) contends that:

Ethnographic positionality is not identical to subjectivity. Subjectivity is certainly within the domain of positionality, but positionality requires that we direct our attention beyond our individual or subjective selves. Instead, we attend to how our subjectivity in relation to the Other informs and is informed by our engagement and representation of the Other.

(p. 9)

Thinking of positionality allows me to understand what moves me as an ethnographer, what frames my research choices as “neutrality of the theorizer can no longer, can never again, be sustained, even for a moment. Critical theory, discourses of empowerment, psychoanalytic theory, post-structuralism, feminist, and anti-colonialist theories have all concurred on this point” (Alcoff, 1991, p. 12). I argue that positionality takes a new dimension with feminism and postcolonialism. Positionality is central in my research as it unveils the complexity of the “Self” and the “Other” and how the fluidity of both govern the relationship between research-researched. It is a form of ethical accountability and “moral responsibility” (Madison, 2005, p. 16). I also reject thinking of insider-outsider positionality in terms of a binary, thinking of it instead in terms of a continuum, especially when I negotiate these positions when “researching my people” (Chaudhry, 1997).

Entering the field and doing research with Muslim youth being visibly Muslim (wearing a headscarf), with a light skin and able to speak Arabic would challenge me with the multiple
complexities of insider-outsider position (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Young, 2005; Chaudhry, 2005) and how they impact my research decisions, research process and outcomes. My religious identity would eventually position me as “an insider”. I argue here that unlike Ghaffar-Kucher (2014), who started her research with a strong belief that she “knows” her participants, I am unable to claim such knowledge. I am doing research with Muslim youth from different ethnic, racial and linguistic backgrounds and several identity markers such as ethnicity, language, age, socio-economic status and academic status would push me to the “outsider” position. I am straddling multiple positionalities, as an “insider” through religious background, mobility, transnationalism, immigration and language to a certain extent, and as an “outsider”; I am an academic, a parent, an adult, a middle-class woman. My membership in these different groups is not static, essential or eternal; it is changing, shifting and shaped by the power relations that inform how “others” perceive me and how they position me in specific situated contexts. For example, on one hand, my Arabic language and my skin color pushed me to the “outsider” position for the Muslim students who had darker skin and did not speak Arabic; on the other hand, the fact that I am Muslim gave them a sense of familiarity. In contrast, Arabic-speaking Muslim students from the Middle East positioned me as an “insider” as they saw that my Arab origin, religion, and language makes me look similar to them, so “it would seem that the composition of ‘self’ can be disputed particularly when a person moves out of one social environment into another” (Young, 2005, p. 154).

Despite the Islamic identity, which is a common “location” between me and the participants, I noticed that my experiences of being and becoming Muslim are different from theirs. At their age, I was thinking of and experiencing my religion in other ways. I acknowledge that the way the participants and I connect and give meanings to our religious identity differs as “I am aware that the category Muslim is fluid, mobile and shifting and I do not aim to contain it within
boundaries of my making” (Khan, 2002, p. xv). Apart from the religious identity, I share other experiences with the young participants, such as the challenges of the journey of (im)migration, mobility, and the struggles of seeking “home beyond borders” (Miled and Andreotti, 2015). These experiences are part of the cultural capital that helped me have access to the participants’ world, especially that of the girls. However, my privileged socio-economic status, my academic location and being the age of their parents did have their impact on how the participants engaged with me and my research. Gaining access to the girls’ lives was much easier; there were not so many boys interested in talking about their experiences and I assume that my gender has an impact on that. As I became closer to several Muslim girls who showed interest in participating in the study, and as I usually joined them in the school atrium during lunch time, they got used to my presence and they started sharing with me their personal stories, their love stories, adventures, fashion tastes, their grades, and the different lies they used to escape their parents’ authority. They “trusted” me and they were aware of the centrality of “confidentiality” in my research. Listening to their stories was an important step towards having a deeper understanding how these girls navigate their teenage years and negotiate their identities, but on the other hand, I felt that instead of just the good rapport and trust needed for researchers to collect data (Boeije, 2010), the relationship is shifting to an intimate friendship. Every encounter with the participants gets me closer to having access to their personal, intimate life details; I was a bit surprised how quickly they disconnected me from the image of the adult, the stranger and the face of authority. I became cautious that “the intimate role relationships, which put people in closer contact than in previous moments of social science, demand greater sensitivity, authenticity and discretion from researchers” (Laine, 2000, p. 130). This dimension of friendship triggered in me a certain sense of discomfort, especially with the blurry boundaries of what constitutes “field” research with adolescents.
Being positioned as an insider entails multiple advantages; like Chaudhry (1997), who is a Pakistani and conducted her research within a Pakistani community, and Zulfikar (2014), who conducted his ethnographic research with Indonesian Muslim youth in Australia, I “have gained several advantages by being an insider researcher” (p. 375); however, being perceived as an “insider” can also lead to several “complications” (Chavez, 2008). As soon as I informed the school principal, (the gatekeeper), about my research, I was pleasantly surprised by his immediate positive response. The school had a high number of Muslim students from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds and has also recently welcomed many Syrian refugee students. As soon as I entered the field and started visiting the school, I became the popular new “Muslim” face asked to interpret, translate, make phone calls to parents, attend parents’ meetings and school events. I quickly became immersed in the school life to the extent that several parents thought I was a new staff member; they got my phone number, asked me to inquire about their children’s behaviour at school and to report to them if one of them was not doing fine at school and if he/she was not taking his/her education seriously. In a conversation once with a female parent, she told me that my presence at school made her feel that her daughter was “safe”. I can’t identify what “safe” meant to the mother, but it was so hard to explain my role as a researcher to parents, who rarely see Muslim staff at schools. The way I was positioned in the school put so much pressure on me and made me rethink my timeline and my priorities. I sometimes got lost in the blurry boundaries between my role as a researcher and being a “Muslim” researcher.

My first phase of field work makes me see my insider-outsider positionality as a continuum and in line with St. Pierre (1997). I argue that ‘abiding by that inside/outside binary is bound to produce failure” (p. 368). Being “Muslim” doesn’t make the task easier; on the contrary, I need to be reminded that the participants’ stories, experiences and world views are unique, as being
Muslim depends also on the traditions, cultures, geographies, education, status and the spaces we inhabit. I see my “Muslim” identity as a space of multiple negotiations that can cross participants’ Muslim identities at just one intersection.

3.5 **Representation: Whose voices do we hear? whose voices do we care to listen to?**

I started this research journey acknowledging that the issue of representation is extremely important to unravel in ethnographic research, especially when engaging with critical ethnography that tries to move away from the normalized discourses of talking on behalf of the “others”, because,

writing about others, writing about ourselves with and among them, is a terribly personal way to conduct social research. That we were once able to identify ourselves as ‘researchers’ and the others as ‘subjects,’ and that we are now not as easily able to do so, is one sign of the complexity of personal ethics in the field, as well as in our texts.

(Goodall, 2001, p. 160)

Writing my ethnography is not only writing about my participants, as my “insider” experiences would get its way through the narrative. I am worried that my voice wouldn’t rise to the participants’ expectations to speak for them. Alcoff (1991) explained the controversies and the problem of speaking for others and contends that “the work of privileged authors who speak on behalf of the oppressed is coming more and more under criticism from members of those oppressed groups themselves” (p. 51).

Several ethnographers (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Chaudhry, 1997; Foley, 2002; Lather, 2001; Madison, 2005; Segall, 2001) questioned the controversies around ethnographic representations and writing. The main issue is the dilemma of the supremacy of the author’s voice and how it
overshadows the participants; as ethnographers are writing to the academic audience, their
ethnographic accounts seem to lose authenticity because “the mere act of importation, of moving
words from one context to another, provides potential for their manipulation and control” (Segall,
2001, p. 585). With the persuasive argument that ethnographic writing is no longer innocent, and
ethnographic accounts are no longer authentic and genuine, I am aware of the limitations and
frustrations of representation, and I would engage in a more reflexive practice on my writing as the
embodiment of contradictions. I am also cautious of the research “surveillance” power, and “that
studying and representing people are acts of domination” (Noblit, 2004, p. 5) that worsen their
marginalization. As an ethnographer, I am the “Author”, the dominant voice, and I will choose the
style, the quotes, the voices I include or exclude. However, I will be resisting the trap of losing the
“original voice” as the account of the field is edited, changed and regulated through specific
formats. After all,

whether explicitly by signed consent (There) or implicitly through making one’s writing
(Here) public in journals or books, the voices we recruit - whether from those in or from
the field - equally serve the ethnographer to explain, connect, theorize, concretize,
illustrate, and advocate a particular ethnographic account. (Segall, 2001, p. 584)

Ethnographic stories and the voices of “there”, the field, are manipulated and are subjugated
to issues of power and the researcher’s authority. Nayak (2006) concurs that “with the development
of post-structuralism, the authenticity of all ethnographic reports has been called into question” (p.
424). As a result of questioning the very writing of qualitative research accounts, the ethnographic
accounts in particular are no longer the reflection of the researcher’s “authority” but a space of
negotiations where multiple voices emerge. Saukko (2003) describes this as “polyvocality” (p. 64)
and argues that life experiences and realities are multiple and reflect different “truths”. That is why
researchers should pay attention to multiple voices (polyvocality), particularly when researching controversial and contested social phenomena. Saukko (2003) explains the impact of this strategy on research when she argues that:

a polyvocal research strategy of listening to the many, possible contradictory, accents of each experience and weaving them together with equally complex and contradictory social issues paints lived and social worlds in more subtle shades of grey. This kind of more nuanced picture may be better suited to make sense of the contemporary social reality, shot through with myriad differences and intersecting and juxtaposed inequalities, and more conducive of dialogues between these differences at both personal and political levels. (p. 67)

In line with Saukko (2003), Foley (2002) suggests a “hybrid voice”, where he uses an ordinary language with a highly personal voice; he describes the hybrid voice as “I narrate and interpret events in an idiosyncratic voice that breaks with the formal disciplinary discourse” (p. 484). Foley contends that by speaking in a “hybrid voice”, he finds himself “willfully polluting rarefied academic discourses with ordinary language” (ibid); he wanted to bridge the cultural and linguistic gap that separates academics from ordinary people. In effect, Foley wanted “to create a kind of “linguistic reciprocity” that transcends the discursive regimes of all academic disciplines, both during the fieldwork and in the final written ethnography” (Ibid). I resonate with Foley’s (2002) “reflexive realist critical ethnography” (p. 486), which brings the field work language, sensations, feelings, messiness and nonsense to the surface, unveils and exposes them. It is an attempt to be liberated from the strict boundaries of academic accounts and writing.
In my reflexive notes for the first six months, my observations, and during constant deliberations with the youth participants, I was always thinking of Freeman, et al.’s (2007) question “how can we best listen to, work with, and represent the people our work is intended to serve?” (p. 30) and like Ghaffar-Kucher (2014), “though I acknowledge the fluidity of my identity, I bear the ‘burden of representation’ bestowed upon me by those who laud and praise such research, and from the participants themselves, who sometimes asked me to represent them” (p. 10). I felt that relying on interviews would exclude so many voices. I consulted with the youth and they suggested that they want to express the impact of their school experiences on their identities and their sense of belonging through visual art and particularly photos. Like youth their age, capturing a photo might make more sense to them. They argued “it is the age of Instagram, Facebook, Flicker and the image captures truth”. The idea was particularly supported by the non-Arabic speaking participants, whose English is very limited. Thinking of my research in terms of collaboration with the Muslim youth, I thought that using the Photovoice method would enable Muslim youth to use photography to capture their daily lived school experiences, how these experiences shape their identities, and to document visually what they are unable to express linguistically. The discussion of the visual images would catalyze personal change, as well as community change (Delgado, 2015). Photovoice is a participatory method that values the participants’ perspectives, opinions, thoughts and knowledge, which would enhance the youth’s sense of self-worth and empower them (Kaplan, 2008). In fact, engaging youth in my research is a fundamental purpose as I believe that:

- youth are frequently studied and perceived as being passive subjects rather than active agents. As mentioned above, they are also often perceived and portrayed as being wicked problems to be solved or managed, and not often invited to actively and meaningfully
engage in the research process. Indeed, research is often done for or on children, but less commonly with them. (Bastien and Holmarsdottir, 2015, p. 11)

3.6 Moving forward

As I am conducting my research informed by postcolonial feminist theory, I am committed to allowing my ethnography to challenge, critique and de-center the dominant hegemonic discourses and the normalized “common senses”. I endeavour to “expose the hidden agendas, challenge oppressive assumptions, describe power relations, gender dynamics and generally critique the taken-for-granted” (O’Reilly, 2009, p. 52). This type of ethnography is a form of activism that not only identifies oppressive systems, but also offers alternatives for resistance (Fine, 1994).

At this time of the “war on terror” and the “terror of radicalization”, and as a Muslim, my research can’t be disconnected from the embodied experiences of being the Muslim in the West. From these experiences, my research emerges; the academic and the personal eventually become intertwined in shaping my research. I admit that it is hard to map the contours of a research done by a Muslim researcher researching Muslim youth; the boundaries of researcher/researched and the insider/outsider become blurry, fluid and change as “the ethnographic life is not separable from the self” (Richardson, 2000, p. 253). I am doing my research in this global turmoil of hate, fear and exclusion of Muslims and I am doing educational qualitative research in this time of “methodological fundamentalism” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p. 770), “paradigm proliferation” (Lather, 2006) and “methodological contestation” (Wright, 2006). Engaging with qualitative research and, in particular, engaging with critical ethnography at this time of theory and methodology profusely requires an engagement with novel discourses of ethnography, reflexivity,
positionality, and representation. It is a time when the researcher’s vulnerability should be admitted, valued and voiced. I am worried and cautious of the unavoidable complexities inherent in representing my participants, as I sometimes feel that I am lost in the entangled webs of ethnographic research.

My choice of critical ethnography is a commitment to respect, honor and value participants’ voices. It is not a mere choice to do a critical ethnography that would position my work in the “critical” and “emancipatory” realm; it is my continuous resistance to all forms of silencing, taming, and methodological mold-shaping because “what makes critical qualitative inquiry ‘critical’ is its commitment to social justice for one’s group and/or for other groups” (Collins, 1998, p. xiv, cited in Denzin, 2009). I keep reminding myself as I am resuming my fieldwork that before embarking on any research – particularly in a politically charged field such as immigration – we need to think about our positionality, why we are engaging in the work, the audience with whom we will share our work, and the implications of this work for our participants. The cost of failing to pay attention to such issues is extremely high, as it cannot only compromise the integrity of our research but may also impact the lives of our research participants in unexpected ways. (Ghaffar-Kucher, 2014, p. 15)

I am still cautious of the complexity of critical ethnography, and the ongoing debate over its ethics and dilemmas. I argue that with critical ethnography, we can never stop being reflexive; I am moving away from the comfort zone of the “researcher/knower” and engaging with multiple facets of discomfort. This ethnographic journey will not be an easy journey of applying set methodological “recipes” associated with conventional, interpretive ethnography and using the researcher’s neutral and objective lens. I am aware of the contested terrain I am landing on, and the
shaking ground around me, and I completely agree that “no group of scholars is struggling more acutely and productively with the political tensions of research than ethnographers” (Conquergood, 1991, p. 179).

For six months, I have felt that fieldwork is similar to a rollercoaster; the moment you think you are in control of the ride, you are swiftly turned upside down. Doing ethnography is more complex than what I expected, and I have learned to be more flexible in caring about my participants. My participants’ timeline matters more, and their opinions on how they want a researcher to explore how their school experiences shape their identities should be respected. They became active participants in the research process, and they claimed their lost voices.
Chapter 4: Beyond men to surveil and women to (un)veil: Muslim high schoolers negotiating “in-betweenness”, “Muslimness” and /or “Canadianness”

4.1 Introduction

The recent rise of ethno-nationalism and right-wing populism, the victory of Donald Trump in the USA, the Brexit vote in Britain, the victory of conservative anti-immigrant parties in several countries across Europe and the recent Secular Act in Quebec (2019) have all put the Muslim “threat” at the center of their debates. The dehumanizing discourses around Muslims, and their homogenizing negative representation, have an impact on how Muslim youth see and construct their identities as Muslims and/or Canadians.

In this chapter I unpack the complexity of Muslim youth identity in the current political, social, economic and cultural local and global contexts by examining the experiences of a group of Muslim youth in a Canadian high school. I position religion as an identity marker that has a huge weight on identity formation and belonging for Muslim youth, but I look at “being” Muslim in this work as contested. “Muslimness” in this study is not an essence but constructed within the dynamic intersections of the multiple axes of identities and informed by differing experiences. I also emphasize that the use of “being Muslim” refers to how the participants identify themselves and the religion they embrace. I engage with a wide spectrum of “Muslim identity” to see how their religious visibility, invisibility, practicing, non-practicing, Canadian-born, foreign-born inform their experiences and sense of belonging and how these intersect with other identity markers. I also problematize “being Canadian” as not the feeling that necessarily emerges with a birth certificate, passport or Citizenship Certificate, but, instead, as constructed
within specific socio-economic, national, transnational, cultural, educational and political contexts.

This chapter is based on my ethnographic research in a high school with Muslim youth aged 14 to 19. This phase of the study addressed the following questions:

1. How do Muslim youth aged 14-19 attending a Canadian public high school negotiate their identities; being and becoming Muslims and/or Canadian?
2. How do they feel about belonging or unbelonging to Canada?
3. How do their school experiences impact their identities and their sense of belonging?

This qualitative study used ethnographic and participatory visual methods to generate data and used critical theoretical frameworks; translocational positionality, anti-essentialism and intersectionality to explore the differentiated ways a group of Muslim teenagers articulate, perform, perceive and produce their identities as Muslims and/or Canadians within the contexts of their everyday experiences and negotiations in the school. This work contributes to scholarly work conducted to construct “new understandings of the Canadian Muslim diaspora as a site of struggle, contestation, and change” (Zine, 2012, p. 2) and to move beyond the simplistic “cultural clash” that has dominated research about Muslims. For this paper I focus on the data collected from my fieldwork observations and the interviews conducted with seven participants.

4.2 The Muslim “problem” in Canada

I started this study in 2016 at a time of increasing focus on the Muslim “problem” in Canada. The debate around the danger of Muslims in Canada is not a recent phenomenon, for it
goes beyond 9/11 and its aftermaths. It witnessed its peak in the 2015 federal election, which was characterized by controversial political discourses around the “culturally incompatible” Muslims (Nagra, 2013) and their “uncivilized” practices and ways of life (Patel, 2012). Zunera Ishaq’s “Niqab” case against the Conservative government and the question of her constitutional right to wear the Niqab while taking the citizenship oath was a trigger of huge controversy (Macleans, 2015). Harper’s ruling Conservatives centered their anti-Muslim politics and used this as an election card (Edelman, 1988) to boost their chances of winning. Harper denounced the practice of wearing a Niqab as “contrary to our own [Canadian] values” and “rooted in a culture that is anti-women”, and he pledged to set up a police hotline to report what he referred to as “barbaric cultural practices.” (The Globe and Mail, March 10, 2015). Conservative Citizenship and Immigration Minister Chris Alexander stated that “We need to do that to protect women and girls from forced marriage and other barbaric practices” (The Guardian, October 2, 2015). These discourses of “we” against “them” divided Canadians further on the question of Muslim “Canadianness” and uncovered the deep-rooted limitations of Canadian multiculturalism, where difference is tolerated as long as it doesn’t challenge the power structures or shake whiteness and Western taken-for-granted supremacy (Khan, 2002, 2008; Miled, 2019; Razack, 2008; Thobani, 2007; Wright, 2012). Despite the Conservative Party loss in the election, and the change in the official political discourses towards Muslims with the Liberal Party, the question of Muslims and how they fit in the Canadian national imaginary persists and continues, with a noticeable increase in Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims since 2015 and an endless debate on their precarious belonging in Canada.

Muslims in Canada have been the target of increasing anti-Muslim racism that ranges from verbal assault to physical violence to the invisible discrimination regarding employment.
For instance, “the number of police-reported hate crimes targeting Muslim-Canadians more than doubled over a three-year period - even as the total number of hate crimes dropped. In 2014, police forces across the country recorded 99 religiously motivated hate crimes against Muslims - up from 45 in 2012” (Paperny, 2016). In 2017 hate crimes against Muslims in Canada increased by 151% compared to 2016 (Statistics Canada, November 2018).

Focusing on the Canadian context, a look at the growing incidents of Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims (Canada Statistics, 2017, 2018, 2019), the tragic Quebec Mosque Massacre that happened on January 29, 2017, and the Quebec Secularism Act (2019) banning wearing religious symbols have renewed the debate over Muslims’ integration and shown that Muslims in Canada are still perceived as a huge “problem” (Bayoumi, 2008) and seriously “problematic” (Miah, 2016), as “the moral panic is seen to be based not only on a physical presence but also an ontological fear – whereby the very existence of Muslims undermines and questions the very nature of Europe” (p. 4) and the West (Bayoumi, 2009; Grewal, 2014; Herrera & Bayet, 2010; Hosseini, 2013; Khan, 2002; Moghissi & Ghorashi, 2010) Focusing on the Canadian context, several scholars in Canada (Arat-Koc, 2005; Bannerji, 2010; Jamil, 2014; Razack, 2008, Thobani, 2007; Zine, 2008, 2012) confirmed that Muslims are perceived as an imminent threat to the civilizational superior values of the West.

At this time, Muslim youth are “under siege” (Sirin & Fine, 2008). They are subjected to global negative representation, a global war on terror, global displacement and migration, and global discourses and policies that exclude them from the national imaginary. From airport security gates to schoolyards, Muslim teens have been under suspicion, global racial profiling and heightened securitization (Jamil, 2016; Jamil & Rousseau, 2012; Kruger et
al., 2004;) and racism (Bakali, 2016; Bannarji, 2000; Fekete, 2004; Meer & Modood, 2004; Razack, 2008; Sensoy & Stonebacks, 2009; Thobani, 2007; Zine, 2009, 2012).

4.3 Theoretical frameworks

Despite the clear shift in the study of youth identities from essentialist frameworks, Moghissi (2006) explains that “the ‘primordialist’ idea of identities embedded permanently in specific populations has been pretty much abandoned in most writings on ethnicity, but survives, oddly, in writing on cultural groups linked to Islam” (p. xiv). This reflects the influence of a persistent Orientalism, and/or the result of the politicization of cultures (Mamdani, 2004). Unlike other youth, Muslim youth tend to be confined within the “one-size fits all identity” and this framework erases the complexities of their experiences and their multilayered, fluid and sometimes contested identities. I argue in line with Van Loon (2001) here that it is

[e]ssential here is the argument that no identity is ever simply ‘present’ or ‘given’; all identities are temporal and symbolic constructions that engage in determining boundaries and establish relationships (between selves and others). These boundaries may be discursively presented as ‘fixed’; however, the complexity of everyday life processes of identification inevitably reveals their deeply permeable and unstable character. (p. 278)

4.3.1 Anti-essentialism:

In this study I advance a theorization of identity that is fluid and involves dynamic, discursive processes of becoming (Hall 1996). Stuart Hall (1993) shifts the discourse of identity from an ahistorical and essentialist view to anti-essentialism; he explains that “the essentializing moment is weak because it naturalizes and dehistoricizes difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological, and genetic” (p. 111). For instance, Hall suggests a nuanced definition of identity as multiple and situational, a product of different encounters and experiences, in contrast with fixed definitions used in both colonial and anti-colonial movements. He presents identity as a dynamic process of multiple, contested negotiations of differences within social hierarchies (of sex, gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, ability, etc.) in a particular context. Hall holds that identity

is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation” (p. 394).

I also use Hall’s perspective that identity is shaped by others and how they see us, because “without “the other” there is no self, there is no self-recognition” (Hall, 1995, p. 8) and that identities are “subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power” (Hall, 1990, p. 225). Drawing on Stuart Hall, several scholars provide more complex analyses of identities and their different contested definitions in the context of schooling (see Urriata & Noblit, 2018; Wright, 2003), and navigate the terrain of “identity” from an anti-essentialist perspective, where culture is not confined to fixed territoriality, practices and imaginaries. I affirm a definition of
culture as “the dynamic production of meaning in a context of incommensurable demands, rather than a fixed and essentializing category grounded in narratives of territoriality, origin and/or originality” (Miled & Andreotti, 2015, p. 30).

4.3.2 Translocational positionality

Particular contexts, locations, and places shape Muslim youth identities and their sense of belonging because the “places where Muslim identities are negotiated, celebrated or resisted matter to how these identities are experienced by Muslims and non-Muslims alike” (Aitchison et al., 2007, p. 2). The concept of “translocational positionality” pays particular attention to the dynamics of the local-global and how their intersections inform identity negotiations; it also suggests a deeper analysis of identity that recognizes “the importance of context, the situated nature of claims and attributions and their production in complex and shifting locales. It also recognizes variability with some processes leading to more complex, contradictory and at times dialogical positionalities than others” (Anthias, 2002, p. 502).

Translocational positionality pays attention to the entanglement of the local experiences with the transnational networks that inform the intersection of the different axes of identity such as gender, race, socio-economic status, sexuality and culture. It examines identities beyond the limitations of national boundaries and reified concepts of territoriality, identity, belonging and citizenship. The use of translocational positionality informs our understanding of how Muslim youth understand and perform their “Muslimness” and/or “Canadianness” in various contexts, as their connections to multiple locations and the intersections of their different identity markers and positionalities seem obvious in producing diverse identity performances. This concept pays particular attention to mobility, migration, diaspora, globalization and transnationalism and allows a deeper analysis of identity and belonging. It is also important to unpack the different
challenges that currently contour Muslim youth identity negotiations and particularly the rise of religious radicalism (e.g., ISIS) and political radicalism (e.g., Bill 51). Both push Muslim youth to the margins and deny them their right to be Canadian and Muslim. As well, more attention should be paid to the dynamics of gender and identity among Muslim youth and how they are impacted by local and global forces.

4.3.3 Intersectionality

In order to move away from the “totalizing discourses that homogenize the Other (i.e., homogenized Otherness)” (Sefa Dei, 2008, p. 358) and the “one-size fits all” dominant analysis of Muslim youth identities and experiences of (un)belonging, I argue that the use of intersectionality as an analytical framework (Hills-Collins & Bilge, 2016) is “a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experience” (Hills-Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 70). It would capture the complexities of these young women’s and men’s everyday situated experiences and negotiations as Muslims and/or Canadians. Crenshaw (1991) coined “intersectionality” to “denote the various ways in which race and gender interact” (p. 1244), and it was well considered and discussed among feminist and antiracist scholars around the globe. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into the history of intersectionality and its different contestations, but it is important to know that intersectionality was introduced in the late 1980s as a heuristic term to focus attention on the vexed dynamics of difference and the solidarities of sameness in the context of antidiscrimination and social movement politics. It exposed how single axis thinking undermines legal thinking, disciplinary knowledge production, and struggles for social justice. (Cho et al., 2013, p. 787)
I argue that “singular identity-based analyses” or “single-axis thinking” further marginalizes certain groups impacted by multiple types of oppression and hinders the differential relations of privilege/power within groups (Cho et al., 2013; McCall, 2005; Weber, 2014). Intersectionality recognizes the fact that social identities and membership in different groups and categories are intersectional not additive, and that our different affiliations entail patterns of oppression and privilege. Engaging with intersectionality in this study is inevitable when analyzing Muslim youth identities and especially when identifying in what ways gender and other identity markers situate these youth. I contend, in line with Abu El-Haj, et al., (2011), that:

if we fail to understand the ways that gendered identities are being constructed and enacted in relation to broader processes of globalization and imperialism, we often end up with a portrait of youth torn between cultures—a perspective that ossifies cultures and risks reinforcing the idea that there is a basic incompatibility between Muslim and Western ways of doing gender. (p. 43)

Muslim youth have been predominantly researched within the essentialist view that has been done mostly from a homogenizing lens framed by the assumption that Muslim identity is an essence, pure and authentic. This perspective hinders how other identity markers intersect and produce different experiences. The homogenizing narratives would render invisible the experiences of “the more marginal members of that specific social category and construct an homogenized ‘right way’ to be its member” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 195) and this would lead to “the repression of intra-group differences, in turn preventing inter-group alliances” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242), and would hinder the different dynamics of how their religious identity intersects with race, class, gender, sexuality and immigration status. Using an intersectional lens is necessary to explore these multifaceted experiences. However, it is important to highlight that
religion hasn’t been explored widely as part of the original intersectionality framework (gender, class and race). In fact, Weber (2014) asserts that “feminist research has yet to adequately engage with the role of religion in intersectionality” (p. 1). There have been “serious attempts at integrating issues of sexual, racial, class, and national difference within feminist theory, questions regarding religious difference have remained relatively unexplored” (Mahmood, 2005, p. 1).

4.4 Study context and participants

4.4.1 Setting

“It was a typical Vancouver day; rainy and cloudy and it was getting colder. I was nervous on the way driving to school, I had never been there, had no clue, my only connection is Raj, the community coordinator. I contacted him via email and I had never met him before. I followed my GPS, to find myself in front of the school. I checked my watch, it was 11.45 am, the bell must have rung, it was lunch hour. I had an appointment scheduled with the principal. I entered the school and there was a large atrium, the smell of French fries filled the air, a large crowd of students were just trying to find their ways to the tables spread all over the place. I immediately spotted a group of girls wearing hijabs; they were talking, and I could see they were laughing with a tall, big White man, while eating. He must be a teacher or a staff member at the school. I also captured quite a large number of Black students, an unusual sight in Vancouver schools; there were a few students sitting at the different tables and a few others lining up in front of the Cafeteria. I had no idea where the Community Room was, I asked a female student and she offered to take me to a big room at the end of the corridor close to a side school door. The room was large, and the smell of peanut butter and toasted bread gave me a sense of warmth. There were about five students busy making their sandwiches, I saw others choosing a
cereal bar or a piece of fruit from the basket on the top of the big table on the right side of the room. The Coordinator’s assistant Jeannette was aware of my visit and she greeted me with a smile. I was still trying to get as many details as possible when the big, tall White man entered the room and in a loud voice asked the students to go to their classrooms. With a large smile he greeted me, saying he was the school principal, Mr. Wittman, and he was happy to see me at school, and in a deep warm voice he added ‘you would very helpful with the new Syrian refugees. We have so many new students.’ I was talking to him about my research, and what I was planning to do, when a Black female student wearing the veil entered the room. He looked at her and said in his loud voice ‘and here is the most popular Muslim girl in the school, Nasiyya’. She laughed and said ‘Assalmu Alaykum’ to me; he started joking with her and he asked her if she needed anything while pulling the paper I had in my hand from me to sign it. Pointing at Nasiyya, he said “You will like this school. Talk to this girl, she’s a very interesting girl.”

(Fieldnotes, November 30, 2016)

One of the most challenging issues I have encountered in this research is finding the proper fieldwork site; a high school in Metro Vancouver that would have a good number of Muslim students from different ethnic, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Faced with an absence of information, as school districts do not keep records or statistics on religion, race and ethnicity, I resorted to my personal networks of teachers, administrators and community organizations to identify the “right” school, and after a long process that lasted about six months, I was able to enter the Sunrise Community High School (pseudonym). The school is a public school, funded by the government, and is part of a large School District in Metro Vancouver. It is located in a low-income neighborhood in a city in Metro Vancouver and at the time of the study, catered to 1038 students (505 females and 554 males). Among this student population, there were 108
students of refugee background (47 females and 61 males). School statistics report 65 languages as home languages, and students come from a wide range of countries of origin. Education is a provincial jurisdiction and schools are located in various school boards and serve the catchment area students. To enroll in a public school a proof of residence is required. All public schools in Canada are provincially accredited, and each follows a standard curriculum that attempt to reflect the history, the people and the culture of the Province. As a community school, The Sunrise Community School is required to reach out to the community and to use the school facilities to organize events and to involve the community. Community schools are regular schools with special belief in, and emphasis on, the value of community involvement. Given the community role that this school was expected to carry out, it benefits from extra funding from non-profit partnerships. Many local businesses provide financial support and donations to certain programs (lunch programs, extra-curricular activities, transportation subsidies).

Each community school also has a coordinator who works on many of the special offerings and programs within the community school. A community school can become the neighbourhood hub, a centre where students, staff, families, residents, agencies and local businesses work together to build a strong and caring community. It is an accessible place where people find support, ideas and new friends. Community schools offer a variety of programs and services to meet the specific educational, recreational and social needs of the area it serves (Website, School District)

The school is located in a city known for its ethnic diversity. According to the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), 50.5% of the population of this city were foreign-born (immigrants). This city is known for being a destination for a large number of families with refugee backgrounds. They experienced displacement and forced migration from different
cultural backgrounds due to its central location, affordable housing and the different social services available and offered to new immigrants and refugees; another factor in the city that attracts Muslims is that it is has one of the largest Mosques in Metro Vancouver. The Community Coordinator, my insider informant and my primary contact in gaining access to the school, confirmed that Muslim students represent a large group, and they come from diverse ethnic, cultural and national backgrounds. This diversity among the Muslim community was an important factor in seeking access to the Sunrise Community High School.

“My first visit to the school and my short meeting with the principal was quick, but encouraging; I just felt they needed me as much as I needed to be in that school. It was my first day and I already met an “interesting” Muslim girl. I left with so much excitement; I felt that this school would offer a very interesting terrain to conduct my research” (fieldnotes, November 30, 2016)

4.4.2 Participants

“I have been visiting the school twice a week for more than a month, I got my Ethics approved and all the way to school this morning, I was thinking of how I need to start recruiting participants. I already met several Muslim students and many of them knew about my research from the poster I hung in different areas in the school. I entered the community room, Jeanette was busy writing something and she greeted me with her usual smile, the room was filled with the warmth of the toasted bread and the smell of peanut butter. From the glass window, I could see Raj engaged in a conversation with a few players from his basketball team. The door was locked but you could hear their loud laughter. It became familiar to me to see several tall and mostly Black students hanging around the Community Room in the company of their coach, mentor and apparent friend Raj. Many students were trying to find their ways to the counter in
the middle of the room to grab something to eat. I sat waiting for the recess to end, exchanged a few hi’s with several students, many faces became familiar after more than a month. I was busy observing two students talking about their tattoos on their backs, apparently done recently and how they were hiding them from their parents (The scene made me think of my daughter who asked me to have another ear piercing and I resisted saying yes) when a blonde, smiling girl approached me and said “Assalamu Alaykum”. I looked at her, trying to connect what I heard with the person in front of me. I answered back “Wa Alaykum Assalam” and before I could say anything else, Jeanette the Community Assistant, originally from the Philippines, said in her usual warm tone while typing on her keyboard, “Alisa, grade twelve, a great dancer too, I forgot to tell you she asked about you yesterday”. Alisa introduced herself and added “Raj told me that you are doing your research about Muslim youth, and you want to talk to many here in the school. If you want, I can talk to you, I am Muslim”. While I was dealing with the sub-conscious assumptions, looking at her blond hair, blue eyes and her leggings and crop top, she added “My parents are Muslims from Albania.” (fieldnotes, February 8, 2017)

For the whole study, I conducted 12 ethnographic interviews with Muslim youth, made up of six females, including Alisa, the first one who showed an interest in the study, and six males. I also conducted five interviews with School staff / teachers and a photovoice project with ten Muslim refugee girls and collected data from parents (informal conversations) during different events in the school.

For this chapter I focus on the data collected from seven participants’ interviews, whose interviews provided rich data and were able to elaborate on their feelings and experiences; four females and three males. I also highlight that in my analysis I take into consideration my data collected through my observations and chats with the 12 participants. I started recruiting the
participants after I spent more than three months in the school as a volunteer trying to familiarize myself with the school, and to familiarize the students, staff and teachers with my presence. I started my field work during Fall 2016, when the Canadian government was resettling thousands of Syrian refugees and I was engaged in supporting their settlement in the school and helping the parents understand the school system.

I started the recruitment process seeking participants by displaying a poster, and I also relied on my field informants, especially the Community Coordinator Raj and the SWIS worker Nasim. Both provided great support in terms of introducing me to several Muslim students from different backgrounds, especially the ones who were not “visibly” Muslim. Raj, of South Asian descent, was born in Canada to immigrant parents. He was a teacher and then assumed the responsibility of Community Coordinator in the school. He was also the basketball coach for the school’s senior team. Raj was so committed to supporting marginalized students and helping them to succeed, for motivating him was his own history of challenges with his schooling as a racialized student. Nasim, an immigrant from Iran, was a teacher in Iran for many years, and given the hardships for recertification to become a teacher in Canada, she was only able to work as a Social Worker in Schools. Her proficiency in Farsi, her cultural background, and her experience with immigrants and students with refugee backgrounds were strong assets that enabled her to find a job with the school district. Like most teachers coming with foreign teaching credentials, she was overqualified for the job, but she was happy doing that, knowing her role was vital in helping marginalized students and their families navigate their schooling and supporting them to succeed.

As soon as I started my weekly visits to the school, I was involved in supporting contact between the Community Coordinator, school staff, ELL teachers and parents of Muslim Arabic
speaking families, and in translating at school events. It was an opportunity to get closer to several students and become a familiar face in the school. The recruitment happened over three months in which I had the opportunity to talk to several potential participants who self-identified as Muslim and were willing to share their perspectives. I was determined to recruit participants with diverse ethnic, cultural, economic and citizenship status to capture their differentiated experiences and show how the different identity markers impact their Muslimness and/or Canadianness. After my initial meeting and conversation with the potential participants, I gave them assent and consent forms and a period of two weeks to think about their participation. After the two weeks, 12 participants signed the assent forms and provided their parents’ consent forms. Before interviewing the participants, I had to engage in observing them in different circumstances to collect data about how they perform and present their identities. My observation of the participants in different contexts in the school before conducting the interviews helped me identify areas that might be unique for each participant, so I could ask questions and encourage a deeper conversation. For example, I knew Alisa’s passion for dance, but I also saw her several times with one senior student, and they seemed to have a special bond. I knew from her that he was her Filipino Muslim boyfriend. I saw Lion with his girlfriend/fiancée several times; he introduced her to me, and I had the chance to observe the dynamics of their relationship. Sabrina was an activist defending refugee rights, and she was involved in many activities with her older “hijabi” sister to denounce Islamophobia and violence against Muslim women. Lina was very active in the Student Council; she spent recess and lunch break in the Counselling Office, helping grade twelve students navigate their graduation and post-secondary options. I knew that Ahmad had a terrible relationship with his dad, that he was working part-time, had bought a car and was missing a lot of classes while also trying to control
his energetic sister, Sarah, a newcomer Syrian refugee who became a student well-known for being smart, confident and ambitious. The interviews were conducted over several months, and each interview lasted between 75 to 90 minutes. I also emphasize that apart from the formal interviews, I had the chance to have several informal conversations with the participants during different school events, lunch breaks, recesses or when they came to the Community Room to have a chat with me or seek advice or help with school issues. The interviews were conducted in the Community Coordinator’s office, most of the time after school hours. The interviews were conducted in English with 6 participants and a mix of English and Arabic with one participant. All interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed.

4.4.2.1 Participants’ profiles

All the participants shared two identity markers; religious identity and sexuality. They all self-identify as Muslims, and they are all heterosexual. I use pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Alisa: 18 years old, grade 12, White. She was born in Canada; her parents are from Albania. They arrived in Canada as refugees fleeing the Muslim genocide that happened in Kosovo. She is from a middle-class family. She self identifies as a Muslim. English is her first language and she speaks Albanian too. She was a dancer in the school dancing club. She is a non-practicing Muslim. She lives with her parents, has three older sisters and one younger brother.

Lina: 18 years old, grade 12. She arrived in Canada when she was 2 years old; her parents are from Iraq and they came to Canada as immigrants. She speaks Arabic and English. She is very active in the school (Student Council) and is doing well academically. She wears a hijab and she is a practicing Muslim. She belongs to an upper middle-class family; her parents are well
educated. She plans to attend a local prestigious university. She lives with her parents, an older brother and a younger sister.

**Sabrina:** 19 years old, grade 12. She came to Canada in 2013 as a refugee with her single mom and 5 siblings after 4 years spent in Turkey after fleeing the war in Afghanistan. Sabrina was wearing the hijab and she removed it a year after her settlement in Canada. She is a model and has an Instagram page that has more than 100,000 followers. She speaks English, Farsi and Turkish. She identifies herself as a Muslim. She intends to have a modeling career. She lives with her widowed mother, one older sister and three brothers and she plans to move out after graduation. She is an activist for refugee rights and women’s rights in Afghanistan. She is a permanent resident.

**Ali:** 17 years old, grade 11. A Black Somali who was born in Canada, his parents are both Somali and arrived in Canada as refugees. His English is that of a native speaker, and he also speaks Somali and classical Arabic. He is a basketball player on the school team and is a practicing Muslim. He lives with his mother and has one sister and one brother. His dad works in Alberta. He comes from a middle-class family.

**Rasool (nicknamed as Lion):** 18 years old, grade 11, born in Afghanistan and moved to Canada after fleeing the war in Afghanistan. He recently became a Canadian citizen. He is passionate about boxing and is known for his nickname Lion as he is never called by his name Rasool. The use of Lion refers to his strength, boxing capacities and also his anger and short temper. He speaks English and Dari. He is not a practicing Muslim. He lives with his parents and one brother and three sisters. He belongs to a middle-class family.

**Ahmad:** 19 years-old, grade 11; he arrived from Syria in 2015 as a refugee. He works to support his family and he is passionate about cars. He finds it difficult to cope with the educational
system in Canada. He is an ESL student and speaks Arabic. He confirms he is a strong believer, but he is not a practicing Muslim. He lives with his parents and 7 siblings. He always hangs out with other refugee students. He is from a low-income family. The family was a Government-Sponsored refugee family and they were living on the financial support of the government (welfare).

**Nasiyya:** 19 years old, grade 12. A Black Somali who is a permanent resident and soon-to-be-Canadian, he was born in a refugee camp in Eritrea. Her divorced parents are originally from Somalia, and her mom arrived in Canada as an immigrant. Her father is in Somalia. She lives with her mom and three siblings in Canada. She wears the hijab, and she is an observant Muslim. She speaks Somali, English and limited Arabic. She comes from a low-income family, she mentioned that her mother works occasionally despite “her good education” and depends on the government for financial support.

### 4.5 Methodology and methods:

This Study is a critical ethnography that took place in a high school in a Western Canadian city for two school years (November 2016- December 2018) and involved 12 high schoolers who self-identify as Muslims; six females and six males aged 14-19. Abu-El- Haj and Bonet (2011) confirm that “we need more ethnographic accounts that examine the complex ways that youth inhabit particular identities in specific contexts and interactions, and across time, not only through talk but also through actions and forms of cultural production” (p. 41). I developed my research design thinking of ethnography because it requires a long and meaningful involvement in the field, and “through prolonged involvement with those who are being studied, the ethnographic researcher is able gradually to enter their world and gain an understanding of
their lives” (Carspecken & Walford, 2007, p. vii). Apart from the different reasons I have explained elsewhere (Miled, 2019), which informed my ethnographic journey, I “argue that there is no better way than ethnography to have a sense of what experiences Muslim youth encounter in their schools and to be immersed in the daily school lives of the participants” (Miled, 2019, p. 2).

Given the complexities inherent in research with youth, my choice of ethnography was necessary to get a deep understanding of the nuances of identity negotiations among Muslim youth and their sense of belonging. Ethnographic accounts are extremely powerful, as they offer “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the situated experiences and allow us to capture the details of the participants’ everyday complex experiences that transcend the local context: relationships, discourses, networks, actions, humor and frustrations (Abu-El Haj & Bonnet, 2011). With my weekly encounters with the students in the Community Room, during the lunch breaks in the atrium, my conversations with teachers, staff and my participation in the ESL classrooms, ELL nights, the parents’ meetings to help new Muslim refugee-background youth navigate the complexities of the process of settlement (housing problems, medical issues, job search), I became involved in the messiness of their lives and “the mundane, day-to-day events, as well as the unusual ones” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 8). I was “trusted” that I would understand to some extent their cultural codes, their worlds and their perspectives. Being a visibly Muslim myself surely allowed me to gain the trust of parents and the participants (Miled, 2019). Another factor that granted me access to their narratives was the fact that they knew that I was a mother of two teenagers their age, and that I too was having issues understanding and coping with the different challenges that my children encounter and was keen on knowing how teenagers their age negotiate their identities in the context of schooling. I showed genuine interest in listening to
their perspectives and they understood that I really needed them and needed to learn from them. It was extremely important for me to ensure that my participants felt comfortable sharing details of their experiences that are not readily observable. I was anxious about the responsibility of representation and constantly thinking “how can we best listen to, work with, and represent the people our work is intended to serve?” (Freeman et al., 2007, p. 30).

The power of ethnography is that researchers do not perceive anything as normal, dull and obvious. All the people we see, talk to and encounter in the field, the details that we observe, the voices we hear, the smells, the actions and interactions we capture, the artifacts and documents we collect, all become essential pieces of a huge puzzle, and each piece has a specific role. No detail is deemed less important or less meaningful. The choice of ethnography to explore Muslim youth identities is informed by my understanding that knowing how young people label themselves does not indicate how they live their lives or what are their cultural practices. A clear research implication here is that studies of youth identities cannot rely on methodologies such as survey research which only take account of ‘attitudes’ while ignoring the ethnographic necessity of close or ‘thick’ description of the myriad ways in which actual identities are constructed and reworked in different social contexts (Rattansi & Phoenix, 2005, p. 107).

The data from the ethnographic observations has been very useful to have a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973), and to be able see from different angles and in different contexts the dynamics of identity construction among the participants. This data has helped personalize the ethnographic interviews and add value and personal touches to the standard questions which were posed to all participants.
The qualitative interview is one of the most important data gathering tools in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), for interviews “enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view” (Cohen, et al., 2000, p. 277). I was interested in their narratives as a narrative interview is open-ended and extended. It is focused initially on a topic of interest to the researcher, but interviewees are encouraged to place their own meanings into the dialogue. The nuances of experience, the subtleties of subjectivity, and the shadings of thought and emotion are the focus of attention (Josselson, 2013, p. xi).

Using interviews allowed me to get the personal narratives of the different participants, and to dig deep into their worlds and how they perceive their identities and how they identify their sense of belonging. It was interesting to listen to their voices and tones and to observe how their voices change with the different experiences they were talking about. It was also important to observe their facial expressions and body language; their bodies became integral to their stories and the embodiment of their experiences.

4.6 Data analysis

Since qualitative data analysis is emergent, the steps of organizing, categorizing and interpreting the data are reiterated. I started coding as soon as I started ‘making sense’ of the data and as soon as special codes and themes emerged. The research questions and the theoretical sensitizers served as an initial guiding framework in which to identify patterns. I read and re-read the data extensively to get a sense of the thick descriptions and the multilayered details. In the data, I was looking for (a) similarity (things that happen the same way), (b) difference (things that happen in predictably different ways), (c) frequency (things that happen often or seldom), (d) sequence (things that happen in a certain order), (e) correspondence (things that happen in
relation to other activities or events), (f) causation (one thing appears to cause another) (Saldana, 2013, p. 155). I was also comparing the experiences of the different participants and using Boeiji’s (2002) constant comparison guidelines to see the differences and similarities across lines of gender, ethnicity, immigration status and socio-economic status. The process of data analysis was a “systematic cognitive process involving comparing, contrasting, looking for linkages, similarities, and differences, and finding sequences, co-occurrences, and absences” (LeCompte & Schensul, 2010, p. 199).

4.7 Findings

In this section, I present the participants’ perceptions of “being” and “becoming” Muslim and/or Canadian, their sense of home and belonging and how they think their experiences at the school impact their identity negotiations and their sense of belonging.

4.7.1 Proud Muslim, fluid identities and gendered and racialized existence

Rasool: “I don’t drink yet. I don’t even smoke. And right now, my goal is to start praying. I go on Friday with my father to pray, but not all the time.”

Alisa: “I am proud to be Muslim; I believe in the faith, but I do not agree with many things and I make my own choices.”

Sabrina: “I believe in the faith and the things that my mom taught me about Islam and the good things, but I do not agree with 60% of the things, especially the things that would make me not like my identity as a Muslim girl.”

Lina: “My parents are religious, but they are not forceful. It was my decision to put on the veil when I was in grade 8, but I see many Muslim girls who wear the hijab because they have to, but
they do not practice the religion. I practice salat (praying) and fasting and try to stay very close to my religious guidelines.”

These different quotes capture the many ways participants understand their religion and how they embrace their religious identity. All participants have expressed a sense of pride in “being” Muslim. They have confirmed that “Muslimness” is an important marker of their identity(ies) as young adults. Each participant constructs his/her Muslim identity in connection to multiple religious and cultural references. The seven participants were born in Muslim families with different levels of religiosity and varied cultural practices. From Alabania to Afghanistan or from Syria to Somalia, the participants have constructed their identities within specific cultural, historical, colonial and postcolonial histories and also in relation to their journeys of migration, immigration and displacement that have shaped how people connect to their religion and how they perceive, construct and perform their Muslimness. The participants come from different cultural backgrounds, socio-economic levels and citizenship status and different levels of religiosity, including opposing sects (Sunni, Shia’a).

4.7.1.1 Performing Muslimness

Alisa, Sabrina, Lion and Ahmad expressed strong connections to Islam’s religious “beliefs” rather than its religious practices. Despite their different cultural backgrounds, countries of origin, citizenship status and socio-economic status, they have shown an interesting perspective on their fluid Muslim identity.

Alisa confirmed that she wants to self-identify as a Muslim even though she could be invisible, as she looks white. She likes the spiritual dimension in her faith. She is a dancer and did not see that dancing is contradictory to her religious beliefs. She emphasizes that her family “like dancing; Albanians love dancing; it is important in my culture”. Although she is not a
practicing Muslim, she occasionally prays when she goes to the mosque with her mom during Ramadan (fasting month) and Eid, and she sometimes watches religious programs in Albanian with her mother to maintain her heritage language. Alisa disagrees with her mother’s expectation that she has to marry an Albanian Muslim man and she cannot disclose to her that she is dating a Muslim boyfriend from the Philippines. She knows that her boyfriend never says he is Muslim because of the negative portrayal of Muslims. She adds, “Anyway no one asks him, he doesn’t look Muslim. I did not care about his religion, but it is a bonus”. Alisa is cheerful, confident and with her “White” look, she acknowledges that it is a privilege to have control over when and where she can position herself as a Muslim.

Lion also demonstrates the challenges that he is facing while adjusting and straddling different cultural worlds; he comes from an Afghani conservative family and is a boxer. Both worlds have cultural codes that are different and seem completely contradictory. Lion has multiple tattoos, wears several necklaces, bracelets as well as ripped jeans, and has a “taper fade haircut”; a popular hairstyle among Black youth, saying “it is very short from the sides and keeping the thick curls on the top.” He thinks that he is a normal young guy who likes to follow the trends of young people and their clothing style common all over the world. He insists that he is a true Muslim, confirming that he is against the Taliban, ISIS and all forms of fundamentalist/terrorist groups. He adds, “Islam is about peace and to like everybody, it is not about men in beards with bombs”. He highlights the notion of “good Muslims” versus “(bad Muslims)” (Mamdani, 2004). Lion has expressed how he hides his “boxer haircut” and tattoos when he is with his Afghani community because his family doesn’t like it; it is not compliant with how an Afghani man should look, but when he is boxing, the haircut and the tattoos become essential physical identity markers to engage with his boxer identity. Lion has a Muslim
girlfriend/fiancée and is so passionate in telling me how much he loves her. He often stressed the fact that she is his fiancée, as he officially talked to her parents and they are aware of their relationship and their plans to marry.

Ahmad admits that he does not pray, but when he is in a gathering with Muslims, he prays with them; for him “this doesn’t mean I lie, but I have respect and I do not want to be seen as bad”. He admits that he has a non-Muslim girlfriend as it was hard for him to maintain a distant relationship with the girl whom he loved back home in Syria. When I asked him if it is common for Muslim teenagers in the school to have girlfriends and boyfriends, he avoided answering the question and added “it is different when you have a Muslim girlfriend, it is a problem”. But he added that he would not accept that his sister has a boyfriend.

Lina has played soccer for many years and she insists on keeping her sporty style, feeling that she tries to adapt her modest outfit to the fashion desires and cultures of young people her age in Canada. She adjusts her looks according to the social context; she was laughing as she was telling me the story of her grandmother trying to censor their choice of clothes and urging her mom to be stricter with her and her younger sister.

Sabrina, a refugee-background student from Afghanistan, came to Canada after a long and tiring journey of displacement. When the principal introduced her to me, in his loud, cheerful voice, he pointed to her in the atrium and said, “the most popular Afghani in the city”. She was proud to tell me that she is a model, and she has thousands of followers on her Instagram account. She talks more about her spiritual connection to her faith, but she does not abide by the “nonsense rules that are imposed on women in Afghanistan”. She expressed a sense of loss as she wants to maintain her religious beliefs, but she doesn’t want the faith that would usually
bring her comfort to turn into a tool to oppress her in Afghanistan and to discriminate against her in Canada.

Sabrina, scrolling on her Instagram account, showed me photos of her in Afghani dress, in minidresses and shorts and crop tops; she also showed me she was posting about Ramadan (the fasting Month), and wishing “Eid Mubarek” to her Muslim friends. Many photos show her dancing to Afghani music and singing in Farsi. Sabrina defines her identity as “real and not fake”, and as a mix. Since her arrival in Canada, she has become more comfortable with her religious choices. She feels she is a mix of different cultural codes, and mostly she wants to be free to make her own decisions. She performs her religious affiliation differently, admitting that since she came to Canada she feels less pressure to have an identity that does not make her feel comfortable. She acknowledges that at the beginning of her career as a model, she tried to maintain a Muslim façade of her identity for her family and community in Afghanistan; she admits that she has restricted the viewing of certain photos in order not to offend the feelings of her grandparents and family in Afghanistan as she still cares about her image “there”, but she feels more comfortable showing who she is and defying the “identity boxes” that were imposed on her. She showed me the hundreds of comments she gets on her photos, especially from Afghani girls and women, as she was feeling a sense of pride to be representing a different kind of Afghani girl.

All participants expressed that religion is important; it is the anchor to give them a sense of who they are. This feeling was stronger among the participants who were new to Canada, and among the African-Canadian participants. Their religious affiliation was essential in distinguishing them from the “others”; it gave them a sense of their position in the spaces they occupy and the world around them.
All the participants focused on the values they are connected to in their religion and they acknowledge the misunderstandings that have dominated mainstream discourses around Islam and Muslims. They were aware of how media portray them, and they fervently refused to connect Islam to terrorism; they barely had any details on 9/11. When asked about what she thinks about the groups that are claiming Jihad and engage in terrorist acts, Nasiyya said “killing an innocent person is not right, it is not right to kill either a Muslim or either a Christian – if you kill an innocent person you kill the whole humanity. That’s what my religion is about”.

The participants showed different understandings of what a “good Muslim is”, but they all focused on the spiritual dimension of faith and the values they cherish in Islam: acceptance, peace, altruism, charity, inclusiveness, justice and equality among races. They did not connect good Muslim with being a practicing Muslim, but with being a good human being. They expressed a form of individual affiliation to Islam, a form of private connection to religion that is not connected to any institutionalized religious belonging.

The participants avoided talking about their sexuality. It was interesting that Ahmad answered in a very straightforward way that he had a sexual relationship with his girlfriend. He knows it was wrong to do that from a religious point of view, but he added that he was not hurting anyone and that his girlfriend did not expect any serious commitment. Lion, however, whose girlfriend is Muslim and wears the veil, assumes that he needs to keep the physical relationship very limited; he was shy to confess that “I only kiss her and hug her”. Actually, I saw them several times at school and most of the time they were embracing each other, holding hands and hugging each other.

Ali confirmed his religious piety, insisting that he has only friends, “no girlfriends”. He is very aware that sex is “Haram” (forbidden sin) outside marriage for both men and women and he
tries to stay faithful to the strict rules of sexuality in Islam. He admitted that it is hard, especially that most of the boys his age both non-Muslims and Muslims, have girlfriends, but he expressed that he is happy that he is too busy with his basketball practices to think of girls.

Alisa and Sabrina have boyfriends. They know that it is a controversial thing and were hesitant to talk about their relationships, neither confirming nor denying that they have sexual relationships. The situation is harder for Sabrina, given she was veiled, a refugee, and “looks” Muslim. Both reject the assumption that Muslim girls are “saints” and admit that they don’t want to play the role of the perfect “pious Muslim girl” (Zine, 2008, p. 40) that is dominant in narratives around Muslim women. Both do not rule out the possibility of marrying non-Muslim men.

Contrary to Sabrina and Alisa, Lina asserted that she is aware of the strict Islamic guidelines and that she is aware of peer pressure and the whole youth culture dominant in public schools, but she asserted that she is able to navigate her teenage years without deviating from these strict guidelines. She showed pride and confirmed that she would eventually marry a Muslim man who should have been raised in Canada and is familiar with the local culture and context.

A significant observation was that all participants engaged in a form of cultural/religious shopping:

This form of religious shopping around was prevalent among both converts and young Muslims. Apart from mere lack of knowledge of the various Muslim orientations, this lack of sectarian awareness also reflects indifference towards the question of belonging to Muslim groupings or orientations, which appears secondary to an individual and autonomous experience of Muslim religiosity. (Jensen, 2011, p. 1160)
All participants expressed a form of critical thinking in their definition of culture and their inherited cultural practices. I found Nasiyya’s argument powerful as she explained how she makes conscious decisions to choose and pick from both cultures:

“I am proud of my culture but there is not a single culture that is 100% right or 100% positive. There's always going to be negative side of it and a positive side of it. So I'll take whatever I think is right or whatever fits my life or whatever that's important for me, I will keep it from my culture and from the Canadian culture, I will take whatever is positive and anything that I think might impact me as a Muslim and Black”.

The participants also distanced themselves from sectarian “inherited” affiliations. They had an idea of the sectarian conflicts and had limited knowledge of the historical development of religious sects. They focused more on their personalized, private relationship with Islam within their contemporary contexts.

Most participants expressed the dichotomy between their private and public Muslim identities, and they talked about the different strategies to maintain a Muslim identity in different contexts. But it is noticeable that their religious identities here in Canada are still shaped by the discursive and cultural practices connected to Islam “there” in the far away homeland of their parents.

4.7.1.2 We Muslims are in all this together: Islamophobia and the reactive solidarity

“I entered the Community Room earlier today and I saw Sabrina there; she was trying to put up a poster. I greeted her and she turned to me and said ‘this is not acceptable, we are attacked and we are not respected; did you hear about the incident of that Muslim teen attacked in the Skytrain; the attacker tried to remove her Hijab and hit her? This is not safe, this is not Canada, we left our countries to have peace and we are not going to have it. America destroyed
everything there and we can’t have a life here’. I sensed a true fear in her voice, I nodded, confirming that I knew about it, as I read the news before arriving at the school and it happened that I personally know the teenager she was talking about. I looked at her face and saw the pain. I was perplexed how to comfort a teen that this is one incident and we need to survive despite everything. It was a tough day for all the girls I met later that day” (fieldnotes, December 5, 2017).

Sabrina was an activist for refugee rights and was involved in different organizations that support women’s rights in Afghanistan. It was interesting to see how she positions herself vis-a-vis the Muslim community here in Canada and there in Afghanistan, and how she engages with her Muslim identity to show solidarity with “oppressed” women in all contexts, including Canada and Afghanistan.

When I reflect on this piece of my field work, I also recall the details of my observations, and I remember vividly that Sabrina was distancing herself from the visibly Muslim students. For instance, I rarely saw her interacting with veiled girls. She once said that many veiled Afghani girls stopped talking to her because she became “different”, adding “I don’t care anymore about what people think”. With the Islamophobic incident which took place on the Skytrain, I heard Sabrina using “we” to defend the teenager in Vancouver and all visibly Muslim women being attacked all over the world. I saw how hard it was for her not to care. The incident made Sabrina prioritize her Muslim identity and her membership in the Muslim community as a way to reject violence targeted towards a visibly Muslim teen her age. Her reaction was similar to Alisa’s when she heard her classmates joking about Muslims: “I look Caucasian, I am a dancer and people do not even think that I am a Muslim. I sometimes hear people talking badly about Muslims, they make like terrorist jokes and when I tell them not to do it and that it is not
right, and I tell them I am Muslim they were so shocked and confused.”. She added, “I do not know how people think that religion is connected to race, so if I am white I can be Christian but not Muslim, maybe we need education at schools about that.”

Despite the differentiated experiences and the differences in how each participant performed and represented his/her Muslimness, all participants had several experiences in common. All the participants confirmed they encountered anti-Muslim, Islamophobic attitudes outside school, such as at work, while crossing borders, in malls and with the police. Ahmad, for example, remembered how his mom was pushed at a bus stop in front of him and was insulted by a White man. Ahmad reacted by hitting the assailant on the face and when the police came they sided with the man who assaulted his mom.

Ali and Nasiyya talked about the racism they encounter every day; they feel the gazes of suspicion, and they do not really know if it is because they are Muslim or Black. Ali believes that it is because of his race first, and when I asked him why he changed school and moved to this school even though it was far from his home he said, “I was always seen as the bad boy, the trouble maker”. Nasiyya confirmed that the situation with Black visible Muslim girls is much worse, stating in a sad tone: “I was once in the mall, I was waiting for my friend to come out of the washroom, two White boys and a White girl just got closer to me and told me, “what are you doing here?, you are not from Canada, go back to your country.” I had this happen to me several times.” When Blackness intersects with Muslim visibility, there is strong evidence of increased hatred and assault, a situation that gets even more complex if the young person is a new-immigrant or a refugee with minimum language proficiency in English. Contrary to Nasiyya and Ali, Alisa’s Whiteness shielded her from anti-Muslim racism, but she witnessed how her mother was illtreated in an American airport because of her Muslim name and she heard many
negative comments about Muslims from her classmates at school. The fact she is invisible allowed her to hear what other Muslims cannot.

All participants expressed that they can’t stay silent when a Muslim is attacked verbally or physically. They showed a form of solidarity that emerges despite their differences to resist violence. They position themselves as Muslims first when these incidents happen, an attitude that Spivak (1987) calls “strategic essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (p. 205). The sense of threat and exclusion that Muslims encounter made them need to feel safe and supported with moving beyond the intra-group differences (such as sectarian, ethnic and national differences) to maintain a sense of belonging to a community. This form of solidarity that the participants showed in the different events where a Muslim is targeted can be described as reactive solidarity. “Reactive solidarity used to describe the related process by which members of a group, subjected to persecution, prejudice or increased pressure of another kind come to experience a greater sense of solidarity with one another” (Bradford, 2009, p. 46).

4.7.1.3 The hijab question: moving beyond the binary

Sabrina: “I wasn’t feeling comfortable wearing the hijab and I removed it after a year since I arrived”.

Lina: “My parents are religious, but they are not forceful; it was my decision to put on the veil when I was in grade 8, but I see many Muslim girls who wear the hijab because they have to, but they do not practice the religion. I practice Salat [praying] and fasting and try to stay very close to my religious guidelines”.

Lion: “I am here, but I want to follow my color, my culture, my religion. So, I told my girlfriend to wear the Hijab, but my sister, she is ten, comes and tells me you’re not allowed to tell me this in Canada.”
No topic brings controversy about Muslim women like the veil, or the “hijab” as most participants label it. The Muslim veil has been central in the construction of Muslims and central to the heated debate around women’s rights and women’s agency (Khan, 2002). I concur that “the Muslim veil raises fundamental questions about citizenship, nationalism and diasporic meaning-making, as well as conceptions of freedom and emancipation that are hegemonic within Western feminist imaginaries, interplaying with national imaginaries” (Bilge, 2010, p. 10). It was important to explore how the participants construct their meanings around the veil/hijab and how the (in)visibility impacts their lives. The veil also is closely tied to the gender dynamics that regulate the lives of Muslim men and women, and it was essential to explore how the male participants perceive the Muslim veil.

Lina was very confident talking about the importance of her hijab and her religious visibility. She explained that attending an Islamic elementary school helped her understand and establish a stronger connection to the religion and to the hijab in particular. She explained that “it is a religion that values women, and that the hijab /veil is not to hide her, but to highlight that she is more than a body, more than physical appearance”. She talked in a very confident tone, explaining how her hijab/veil gives her a sense of safety and empowers her. She feels strong and is able to resist all the “temptations”. It helps her set her boundaries vis-a-vis others and protects her through the tormenting phase of teenage years. She confirmed that it doesn’t make her isolated at school; she had friends from different backgrounds, and she is aware that they also have religious and cultural restrictions and behavioural guidelines. She connects her veil to a way of living and a commitment. Rather than a dress symbol, she sees it as a regulator for her behaviour. The veil represents her publicly, so she needs to maintain a perfect image of the Muslim woman, which is of a woman who is, according to her, “honest, respectful, educated,
strong, caring and involved in her community”. She confirmed that she succeeded to “fit in” her school circle despite her difference. Her friends respect her decisions not to drink, not to have a boyfriend, not to hug male friends. In her cheerful tone, “It’s better to avoid all these problems and focus on education, especially for girls”. Lina perceived her veiling as necessary to claim a Muslim identity but chose to embrace modest clothing with a sporty attire. Most of the time she wore joggers, Adidas Tiro pants and sneakers, for she was a soccer player and kept that passion for her sporty look, even though, as she explained with a giggle, “that look might be perceived as not ‘Islamic’ enough for my Grandma”.

Nasiyya showed a more conservative approach in her dress; she confirmed that she was a strong believer and a devout Muslim. She was wearing a veil and she mostly wears long skirts. She said, “I never questioned the hijab, it is part of me, all girls in my community wear the hijab; we can’t be a true Muslim if we do not wear the hijab and wear modest clothes. I have Muslim friends who do not wear the hijab; I like them; it doesn’t change my attitude, but for me I can’t, it is part of my identity”. Although she shares with Lina a commitment to an Islamic straight path (Zine, 2001), they differ in the way they adopt modest clothing and their veiling. Each had her reasons for why she wants to be visibly Muslim. Lina considered it a tool to set her own boundaries vis-à-vis herself and the “others”. Nasiyya became more attached to her veil, for as she was growing up experiencing exclusion as a Black girl, her veil offered her the sense that she belonged to a community. It is the imaginary of the Muslim community that she proudly feels a part of. She never questioned if the veil is obligatory for Muslim women. She just grew up seeing all women around her wearing it, and she feels deeply comfortable wearing her hijab, she sees it is part of her, an extension of her religion and it became her “second skin” (Mirza, 2013, p.10).
Sabrina was veiled when she was in Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey, but her attitude and experience are completely different from those of Lina and Nasiyya. She talked about how awful the situation in Afghanistan was for “all the innocent people”, but she was particularly talking about how hard it was for women. Sabrina left the country when she was 12, but she was still haunted by the war there. The memories of her father killed by the Taliban, the displacement they went through, her mother’s struggle to survive crossing borders with five kids were still vivid and painful. She stated that she did not have a choice as her clothing and veiling were dictated by the cultural norms and traditions; interestingly, she mentioned that she was surprised to discover in her displacement that Muslim women look different and wear their veils differently. The hijab was part of the past she wanted to distance herself from, the patriarchal structures that she felt were so irrational and unfair and not religious. Sabrina confirmed that the war in Afghanistan made the situation of women much worse.

It was interesting to explore Lion’s and Ahmad’s perspectives on the hijab as both thought it is very important for them to see the females in their families wearing the hijab. Lion, for example, tried to make his sister (12 years old) wear the veil, but she was resistant and told him that he had no right to ask her that because his girlfriend did not wear the hijab at that time. So, he asked, convinced, and/or forced (can’t confirm) his girlfriend/fiancée to wear the veil. When I asked about the reason why it is so important for him, he said “I want my sister and my fiancée to wear the hijab, because I don’t want people to think that they are Christians. If Muslim women do not wear the hijab, we don’t know who they are”.

Ahmad expressed his fear that his younger sisters would refuse to wear the veil when they grow up and thus, they will not be attached to their religion. I know from my conversations with his sister at school that he was trying to control her clothing style and made comments on the
tight clothes she wore and the boys she talked to. However, Ahmad was not religious, and he was not practicing; similar to Lion, his attitude did not emerge from a religious standpoint but is an expression of the subconscious cultural norms related to a dominant patriarchal point of view. The veil is a form of distinguishing “their women” from the rest. It was important for them to maintain the cultural and religious difference and, according to them, women are supposed to carry out this task. When I asked Ahmed if he considered praying more important than the hijab, as praying is one pillar of Islam, he said that “praying is between you and Allah, and he can forgive you, but wearing the hijab is for the people and in my country (referring to Syria), they do not respect you if you don’t”. It is important to see how Ahmad and Lion were regulating their Muslim identities here in Canada, with their “back-home” religious/cultural practices and prioritizing the public performance of religion. Despite their limited religious knowledge and religiosity, they are centering the hijab as the utmost performance for women’s piety and being a “good Muslim” woman. In their diasporic spaces “the construction of women as the defenders of national culture and traditional community and family values” (Dunne et al., 2017, p. 276) became central as they are aware that they are unable to carry out that task themselves.

The question of the hijab is so controversial and has been for years looked at, on one hand, as a sign of the patriarchal interpretations of women’s piety in Islam and, on the other hand, as the expression of agency of Muslim women (Mahmood, 2005). All female participants presented different perspectives on their veiling or unveiling as it can’t be seen in a binary perspective. It has to be explored within specific subjectivities, histories and should be context bound to overcome the over generalization and the dominant hegemonic discourses on Muslim women. It has also to be examined within the colonial histories and the neocolonial discourses that still raise the Muslim veil as a civilizational issue and a major reason for the West to invade the
“others” and liberate their women (Abu-loghod, 2002; Khan, 2014; Razack, 2008; Zine, 2008). Furthermore, the female participants confirmed their multiple ways of resisting sexism and gender inequality, and all of them acknowledged the dominant patriarchal structures not only in their Muslim communities but also in their daily lives in Canada. Sabrina showed me a photo on her Instagram account which she took a few days after the attack on a Muslim girl, in which she was wearing a scarf; she said “look, I am wearing the scarf in this photo. Honestly, I sometimes miss it, but I never thought that I would put it again, you know...just like I did not want to be obliged to wear it, I do not want to be obliged to remove it. It should be MY choice”.

The female participants, each in their own ways, developed a form of resistance to the normalized, sexist and racist microaggressions they had to encounter daily; they were juggling what seems to be contradictory forms of identification and performance of a Muslimness that is no longer shaped by home and community culture and religious practices only, but by a form of a global youth culture that transcends the cultural boundaries of the back home and the present home. It was fascinating to see how the different axes of the girls’ identities in particular intersect: gender, race, class with multiple religious references, personal selection of Muslimness, diasporic cultural practices of Islam, youth global culture, and their cultural practices in the country of origin. Their Muslimness is deeply fluid and transnational and profoundly impacted by how they are perceived in their present spaces and what discourses impact their daily negotiations.

How individual women negotiate the contradictions in their lives suggests a plurality of ways of performing Muslim identity and/or responding to being positioned as Muslim in North America. Their negotiations challenge the regulatory notions of culture and religion as
fixed and static: notions discursively constructed within the duality of Islam and Orientalism. (Khan, 2002, p. xx).

During different chats with the participants, the importance of their mothers in their lives was very noticeable. They were the ones who made the major decisions in their families, they were also the faith and cultural keepers. Sabrina and Nasiyya in particular talked about the hardships their single mothers encountered to be able to give them the chance to have a better life. The portrait of the mothers working hard, crossing borders, learning a new language and coping with the challenges of settlement are the silent stories that are rarely heard about Muslim women. The journeys of these Muslim women, their strength and resilience need to be explored further.

4.7.2 Where is Home? Here …There or …Nowhere?

Sabrina: “This is my home because I have personal rights, human rights, refugee rights. And as a teenage girl, I have my own rights and my freedom. No one can force me to live a life that I don't want”.

Alisa: “Home is Canada, I was born here, I have my life here, my present and my future. I have no other home to go to. I visit Albania, but never thought it was home, for my mom it is still home”.

Lina: “It's funny because a couple of weeks ago I got that same question, but my mom was with us. And she said, no, home will always stay Iraq. Whereas for us, I came here when I was two and a half years old and I went to Iraq when I was eight, I believe, and we stayed there for a year. Did not go well for us. Let's just say that. I do consider this as home, yeah. I was raised here. I picked the Canadian lifestyle and I feel that this is the place where I feel most comfortable”.

Nasiyya: “It [Canada] gives me home. It gives me safety. It gives me education. I appreciate that
but still people even though they are not from other countries – no one actually can claim that Canada is their Home, apart from aboriginal people, they do not see me as Canadian...

Citizenship works with the government, but in the society, it might not make a difference because at the end they will judge how I look, and I am black and Muslim”.

Three female participants showed a strong sense of belonging to Canada, and they expressed positive identification with “becoming” Canadian, regardless of their degree of religiosity and piety. The invisible Muslim Alisa and the veiled Muslim Lina had similar arguments: “they were raised in Canada and they feel this is their home”; both had the chance to visit their parents’ country of origin and both confirm that they like to go for visits but they cannot live there as they are not used to life there. So, belonging to them doesn’t center around religion but around the cultural and social codes they are used to. Sabrina, the recent refugee from Afghanistan, despite her short time in Canada confirmed that this is where she feels home, protected and safe. This feeling of belonging was enhanced when she removed her hijab and she felt that she is more accepted, and she could “fit in” to the portrait of a Canadian. Her previous experience of the war and the risks of her displacement journey made her long for a place she could call home. Only Nasiyya, the black Somali participant, expressed that she could not belong to Canada as she feels that she is excluded. She talks about Somalia, a country she has never visited, in a very emotional way. It offered her an imaginary of home that she longs for and never had. She spoke sadly about being Black and Muslim in Canada: “it's very tough being a Muslim and Black at this time, at this particular time. I'm hoping it may change. I don't have hate towards anyone, I am not saying that I don’t like Canada. Just I don’t feel comfortable because of the society, the discrimination we're facing, the hard time that we're going through is what's making me not feel comfortable or not feel I belong here”.

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Ali shares the same feelings and contended that Canada is not accepting him because he is black. He remembers he was called the N word, how he was always accused of any trouble that happened in his past school, proving in another context the findings of the ethnographic study of Sefa Dei et al. (1997), namely “that there is heavier surveillance of Black males and that they are more likely to become the object of discipline” (p. 98). Ali is still going through the same kind of surveillance and discipline, but he emphasized “not at this school”, and in a sad tone, he questioned where he could belong if he had no home here and no home to return to. He was born in Canada, but doesn’t feel he is a Canadian, he has never been to Somalia and he can’t imagine how life is over there. Ali’s sense of belonging highlights the question of inclusion and exclusion that has shaped the non-white Canadians. Belonging is not about how he feels but how he is situated as other, alien in the imaginary of what a Canadian is. His attitude confirms Anthias’s (2008) argument that “belonging questions often emerge because we feel that there are a range of spaces, places, locales and identities that we feel we do not and cannot belong to, in the sense that we cannot gain access, participate or be included within” (p. 8). Ali changed schools; it takes him about an hour to travel to his current school. When I asked him why he changed schools, he said that he wanted to be in a school where he could be with other Black students; he added “there wasn’t really any African, or Black students there. I thought it’d be a better fit for me to come to this community school where there are so many African and Black students. There are more Africans, you know, just more people to interact with. And I love, I love basketball and we most of the players are Black”. Ali identifies himself as “African and Black” and he adds “more like Somali Muslim, I don't really consider myself Canadian. I’m just born here”. Ali’s sense of belonging is informed by the experiences of exclusion he experienced in the different schools he attended, which highlights the role schools play in how young people
develop their sense of belonging to the nation state among the children of immigrants and refugees.

Ali’s feelings are similar to the feelings of Ahmad, a recent Syrian refugee; he contended that “Okay. Well, even though the government says you are welcome, but I don't think we are welcome by society”. When I met Ahmad, he had been at school for only a year, arriving in late 2015. His English improved considerably, but he arrived too late to adjust to the educational system and to meet the graduation requirements. He was placed in grade 12 according to his age and he had to leave at the end of the year. He was working to support his family and he was not feeling that this is home for him. The argument advanced by Ahmad and Ali, one Black Muslim Canadian-born and one Muslim refugee, are centered on how they are perceived; they understand their sense of belonging in the eyes of the “others”. Both explained different patterns of exclusion: religion, race and immigration status that push them to the margins of the Canadian nation.

It is interesting to see how the three female participants Alisa, Lina and Sabrina, despite their differences in terms of their religiosity, expressed a strong attachment to Canada. The three expressed that “home” is here in Canada, despite their parents’ narratives that home lies there in a faraway land that they left a long time ago. Both Alisa and Lina talked about their mothers reminding them that home is where their roots are. On the contrary, Sabrina’s mother is not longing for her home country; she reminds Sabrina that “here is your home, here is your present and future”. Her mother suffered the loss of her husband and lived the horrors of being displaced. Home for Sabrina and her mother is where they finally feel safe, a basic need that all humans need and so many young people have been deprived of because of conflict.
The three female participants showed a stronger sense of belonging to Canada and feeling that their home is here in Canada, where they are living their present and planning to live their future. All of them acknowledged the challenges they face in carving out their own spaces where they feel comfortable with the different aspects of their identities. A third space of negotiations, a space where they can adjust their past roots to their present routes, where they can make their own decisions and choices, where they can maintain a form of real and imaginary connection to their faith, the places they call home, only resides in their memories and imaginations. Alisa, for example, to please her mom, goes with her to the mosque during Ramadan or Eid. Lina accepts her mom’s clothing restrictions, but she manages to make her own choices and keep her favorite style. Unlike Lina and Alisa, Lion and Ahmad show an emotional bond to Canada, but it is hard for them to call it home; both acknowledge there is no home to return to, but they also struggle to find a real home in Canada. When they described what home means to them, it was a mix of both places; the culture and religion of the lost imaginary home, and the peace, safety and opportunities of the new home. Lion connects Canada to his dreams when he says, “I'm a boxer and I want to become pro, go to Olympics and represent my country Canada”. Ahmad is frustrated because he is unable to continue his high school education due to the age limit, and he cannot become a police officer because he has to work full time to support his family. This gave him a sense of loss, as his geographical displacement and coming to Canada late have put him at a big disadvantage of feeling home: “Since I was seven, I was moving from one country to another. In Jordan I didn’t go to school”. Both Lion and Ahmad mentioned several incidents where they encountered exclusion, racism and Islamophobia, but what was mainly inhibiting their sense of belonging was their inability to take control of their lives. They feel they need to always prove they are good men and good people. They need to care a lot about what other
people think of them. They are in a constant pursuit to be seen, heard and recognized as not a threat.

Ali showed a completely different perspective; he stated that despite being born in Canada, his perfect English and the fact that he never visited Somalia, he does not feel that Canada is home because of his race; he is reminded all the time that being Black is not Canadian. It is impossible for him to fit in to the imaginary of the Canadian identity, as his color pushes him to stay on the margins. When I asked Ali to rank his multiple identifications he put “Black, Muslim, Somali and Canadian”. The same feeling was shared by Nasiyya, the female Black participant; in her passionate voice, she spoke about how hard it was for her to find home in Canada because she is Muslim and Black. The question of Black youth and their belonging has been the focus of several scholars (see Ibrahim, 2014; Gosh & Abdi, 2004; Sefa Dei, 2000, 2017; Wright, 2012); however, the work on Black African Canadians is comparatively rare. In her study with Muslim Black Canadian women in Toronto, Jan-Therese Mendes (2011) explains that “Black Muslims in Toronto are undoubtedly a minority within a minority and ‘born Muslim status’ does not override the conspicuous anti-Black prejudice of the dominant Muslim and non-Muslim communities” (p. 102). The dilemma of being alienated and marginalized in both worlds put these Black Canadian youth in limbo.

The participants shared the perception that belonging is not related to citizenship status; they differentiated between their legal status as Canadians and their social status in the Canadian society and they all agreed that the way you look, dress, and pray are their passport to social inclusion rather than their government passport. The participants expressed a critical understanding of belonging that aligns with Anthias’s (2008) definition:
[Belonging] not just about membership, rights and duties, as in the case of citizenship, or just about forms of identification with groups or others, but it is also about the social places constructed by such identifications and memberships and the ways in which social place has resonances on stability of the self, on feelings of being part of a larger whole and the emotional and social bonds that are related to such places. (p. 8)

The participants expressed that belonging is not about their legal status, but it is about feeling safe, respected and a member of the Canadian imaginary community. Belonging for them is feeling “at home” as “home stands for a symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment” (hooks, 2009, p. 213). The participants are situating their relationship to Canada on a continuum from belonging to banishment (Bakht, 2008).

In fact, the experiences of Canadian-born Alisa as a White and invisible Muslim differ completely from the Canadian-born, Black boy Ali; their experiences demonstrate that belonging is defined by how they are perceived and how they are positioned within their social contexts. The difference in their experiences is the proof that race is a determinant factor in people’s lives and life chances. Both were born in Canada, both speak English as their first language, both are from middle-class families and are doing well at school. However, Whiteness gives Alisa a different experience of “Canadianness” and belonging, as it gives her the privilege not to be seen as Muslim and/or Black. Belonging depends on how our identities are positioned and constructed and “identity is influenced by one’s location in relation to others and the way others identify and define us” (Gosh & Abdi, 2004, p. 31).

All participants showed a strong connection to Canadian multiculturalism and what it represents: difference, acceptance, tolerance, as it offers them the sense that they legally belong to Canada. This is a feeling that is common among immigrant youth (Ali, 2008), and was
promoted by the school curriculum and media discourses around the Canadian “mantra of multiculturalism” (Perry, 2015, p.1637). However, the feelings of (un)belonging among the Black, refugee and new-immigrant participants trouble the perfect narratives of Canadian Multiculturalism and highlight the discrepancy between the discourses and the lived realities.

4.7.3 The school experiences: We belong here but ….

Ali: “the school is wonderful, they let us pray and I once used to pray in the principal's office”.

Lion: “This school is the best school, Yeah, the teachers that are responsible. They, like real family, I don't know another school like this. It is not like outside”.

Sabrina: “It is in this school that I felt peace and safety, I love coming to school, we have support and Mr. Wittman is like a big brother or father, he knows all our names, I ask him for advice, and he is always available. You can also see teachers and staff who are brown and black, they came as immigrants, you know we have a teacher who was a refugee”.

Nasiyya: “I like my school and I like Mr. Wittman, he is a friend, he jokes with me, he once supported me against a teacher who was saying wrong things about Islam and I was offended. I am the only one who is different but at some points like in my other classes, even though I am the only one who is wearing hijab but still I get involved with everyone like we are inclusive. They understand that it doesn’t make any difference”.

Ahmad: “Mr. Wittman (the principal) is so nice. Like, when he sees me, he talks to me, we invited him for dinner at home and he came to our house. When he sees me buying food from the cafeteria, he pays for my food. When I tell him I have money, he says you are like my son and I like doing that”.

The surprising finding in this study is how the different participants confirmed that they like their school and feel supported and valued. This is contrary to most studies available on
Muslim youth in the West, in particular the United States and Canada. This study may be one of the rare studies that identifies positive feelings among Muslim students towards their school and their schooling experiences. As I identified in the previous sections, discrimination, racism and Islamophobia in their different manifestations are part of the daily lives of these participants, but they all confirmed that the incidents they talked about happened “outside school”.

From the invisible Muslim Alisa to the visibly Black Muslim Nasiyya, the narratives around the school demonstrate that the school environment provided the participants with a sense of safety and support. Each participant felt respected, valued and important. They all contended that they feel a strong sense of belonging to the school community. All the participants, despite their differences, confirmed that they have a strong emotional attachment to that particular school; they expressed their feelings through connecting “belonging” to parallel concepts such as “relatedness, sense of community, sense of school or classroom membership, support and acceptance” (Osterman, 2000, p. 343).

As part of the larger study, I observed how young Muslim students navigate their daily school experiences; I heard their stories, listened to their frustrations and was a witness to their struggles. Despite their different backgrounds and experiences, the only shared feeling among them is the positive impact of the school on their lives, their sense of belonging, their self-esteem and their connection to their religious identity.

From the interviews, the observations and my informal chats and conversations with the parents, I was able to classify the different factors that enhanced the participants’ well-being and their sense of belonging to the school community. The field note below was written before I conducted the interviews; it highlights several aspects that were important to the participants. I
arranged thematically around what made the participants feel comfortable and supported at school.

“It was lunch time, I arrived a bit late today to the school, I entered the Community Room. Raj, the Community Coordinator, had a meeting in his office with his basketball players, I could see they were laughing and teasing each other. Annette greeted me and added, “Can you help me today? I need you to call the Arabic speaking families today to remind them of the ELL night. We sent the forms with their children, but you know kids forget”. I put down my backpack and headed immediately to the Atrium, it was packed, noisy and the smell of pizza filled the air (it was pizza day). I saw Mr. Wittman in the middle of the Atrium, he was talking and laughing with a group of recent refugee girls. I got closer, greeted them and asked him, how are these girls doing? He answered in a very confident voice, ‘they are working hard for their brilliant future’” (fieldnotes, 02/08/2017).

4.7.3.1 Racial and ethnic diversity in the school

The participants highlighted the importance of racial and ethnic diversity in the school; it was so important for them to be in a school where they can see people like them. As mentioned in a previous section, Ali moved to the school because it has a good number of black students; he expressed a strong sense of belonging to the school and particularly to the basketball team that consisted mostly of black students. Ahmad and Sabrina highlighted that they liked the fact that there were many refugees from different cultural and national backgrounds, and they know that there were a good number of Muslims in the school, more than any other school in the Lower Mainland. The cultural diversity and the shared experiences of (im)migration and displacement among several students made the participants feel that they are not “Others”, aliens, or strangers. The demographic diversity in the school played an important role in creating a sense of empathy
and connection among the different students. Of course, the participants mentioned certain conflicts that happen among the students, but they all emphasized the school’s positive environment and good inter-faith, inter-racial relationships.

4.7.3.2 Religious accommodation

It was surprising to learn as soon as I started my research that the school cafeteria did not serve any pork products. The participants explained that this make them feel that their dietary restrictions were respected. They all mentioned that the school community is aware of the month of Ramadan (the fasting month); the participants who are graduating informed me that contrary to other schools, their school takes into consideration the time of breaking the fast when they organize graduation events, so that the Muslim students are not deprived of attending these important events.

Lina also mentioned that two years ago her mom put in a request to help the Muslim students pray at school. The school principal agreed and there was a room allocated for the students to pray in. Lina added that the number of students praying at school decreased so they no longer needed to have a room. Ali, contrary to his feelings of alienation and marginalization because of his race and religion, expresses a strong feeling of comfort at school. As he is very committed to praying on time, he informed me that he enjoys certain flexibility to accommodate his religious commitments. For example, he is allowed to miss the start of basketball practice to join the Friday prayer, and he can use the Community Coordinator’s office and even the principal’s office to pray. Ali, in his confident voice, added “I just fit in perfectly in this community, everyone is like very nice, you know, caring and they, they actually care about every player”. His school basketball team, made up mostly of Black students, gives him a strong sense of belonging.
All the participants highlighted the sense of safety that they feel at school and all emphasized that all religions are respected. What is also noticeable in the school is that the staff and teachers are relatively ethnically diverse and come from different cultural backgrounds. Because of the lack of ethnic and racial data about staff and teachers in the school and in the school district, a simple observation can lead to the conclusion that there are a few people of color among the support staff and teachers. The participants confirmed that they have teachers who are immigrants and a teacher with a refugee background.

4.7.3.3 Connection with families

The school is a community school, which means a stronger connection with the community and in particular more support for the families. The school was committed to reaching out to the families, especially the newcomer families and those who seem to have financial needs. I also helped with calling the Arabic speaking families to inform them about different events at school. Among the participants two were going to graduate, and graduation involves several social events: Grad dinner, Grad prom, Grad dance; I asked the participants if they were going to attend these events; they confirmed that the parents trust Mr. Wittman and he usually meets the parents to explain the rules and the guidelines of these events. The outreach to the family and the effort made by the school principal, the Community Coordinator and the SWIS worker had a positive impact on the relationship between the school and the families. The school also plays an important role in the lives of students who experience conflictual relationships with their families. The participants talked about their parents’ fear that they lose their religion, cultural norms and lifestyles and also put high educational expectations on their children. The argument “we are here for their education, we sacrificed everything”, was echoed by different parents I met.
4.7.3.4 Leadership of care

**Lion**: “You know, there was a time I was not good at school, I was not studying well and I was missing classes. Mr. Wittman called me to his office and talked to me, he was nice and he wanted to know what was happening with me. I told him I work a lot to pay for my boxing, after a week on my birthday he and Mr. Finn PE teacher got me a nice book on famous boxers and their stories of success. It was a big surprise. I became a better person because he trusted me and I want him to be proud of me.”

**Ahmad**: “I had a car accident and when I was with the police, I didn’t call my dad, I called Mr. Wittman and he came, and he helped me. He tells me all the time that I am smart and I can achieve anything I want.”

These two quotes pave the way to discuss another important factor that connected students to the school, specifically the leadership of the school Principal and the Community Coordinator, the dedication of the staff and teachers to support all students and care for their individual needs. All participants expressed that Mr. Wittman and Mr. Raj care about them, listen to them and support them beyond what would normally be expected of these roles. Each participant had a story to tell about the culture of caring in the school. Offering Lion a book about famous boxers, supporting Ahmad with his car accident and his police investigation, allowing Ali to pray in the principal’s office were just a few actions that the three male participants mentioned to highlight why they feel valued, respected and loved. The school leadership was focused on the well-being of the students before their academic records. There was a strong awareness that the school population is mostly composed of “others”, who would encounter different forms of marginalization and the school leaders, staff, and teachers were committed to making their experiences in the school much better.
All participants, despite their differences, expressed their respect and admiration for the principal, the Community Coordinator, the SWIS workers and several teachers who were trying their best to support the students and enhance their sense of belonging to the school. Nasiyya mentioned an incident that was so important to her in making her feel she is a member of the school community. One day a teacher in her Social Studies class used the expression “Islamic terrorism” in class, but Nasiyya disagreed with the teacher and she felt offended and she wanted to prove the teacher wrong; the issue escalated and the Principal had to intervene: “I was in trouble with a teacher, she was judging me in front of the students, yelling at me, and I had to report it to Mr. Wittman”. The principal sided with Nasiyya and explained to the teacher that “terrorism” should not be associated with any religion. The participants expressed that the overall school environment is very positive and very supportive for Muslim students, but they also mentioned they were exposed to few minor incidents of anti-Muslim racism from classmates and teachers but expressed that the principal was always there to support them. They emphasized that these incidents were rare and did not impact the way they feel about the school.

Apart from Alisa, the experiences of participants in the school were totally different from their experiences outside. Hence, many felt that graduating is important and a huge step, but they were worried about how they would navigate post-secondary education outside the tightly knit, supportive community school. The participants’ sense of belonging to the school was shaped by their everyday experiences with their school community; from the pork-free cafeteria to the accommodation of prom celebration, there was a clear effort from the school leadership to create inclusive spaces for the students who have been targeted by exclusionary discourses and policies and increasing anti-Muslim racism. The principal, several staff and several teachers, mostly
racialized, were aware of the different forms of marginalization which targeted Muslim students, and there was a conscious decision to support them and to make them feel safe.

Despite the clear vision of the school leadership to create a safe space for Muslim students and enhance their sense of belonging, the participants expressed several concerns. Nasiyya and Lion talked about the absence of interesting topics about Muslims and Islam, and Lion questioned the absence of Muslims and their stories in the curriculum: “Till now I read three books about Anna Frank, yes it's three books, but for me I do not have any story about people like me, no story that would be about Muslims”. This frustration with the curriculum and textbooks was shared by all the participants and they all expressed that “more education is needed about Muslims and Islam”. They emphasized that it is important to examine how culture is taught in classrooms, as they only encounter an essentializing portrayal of Muslims and Islam. The participants mentioned that they do not see in the curriculum anything positive about Islam or Islamic history.

Three participants were doing well academically, Alisa, Lina and Ali, given their familiarity with the educational system, their language proficiency and their families’ stable financial situations. Nasiyya showed a strong determination to get through the graduation requirements and enter a college. Her motivation emerged from her positionality as a Black and Muslim woman when she explained “I am working very hard to achieve what I want and to show that a Muslim woman can do like any other woman and can achieve what she want”. However, the three other participants were struggling; two were students who spoke English as Another Language and they were having difficulties managing the graduation requirements because of the language barrier. The situation is more complex for the recent refugee Ahmad, and Lion, who both work long hours, Lion to spend time on his passion “boxing” and Ahmad to support his
family of ten. Both explained that schooling is not flexible for students like them. Despite the multiple challenges the participants were facing, there was a strong sense of belonging to the school community, and this feeling of being supported at school alleviates the feeling of alienation and marginalization they encounter outside the school. In various degrees, they all expressed their resilience and a sense of hope.

4.8 Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has delved into an empirical exploration of how a group of Muslim youth negotiate their identities and their sense of (un)belonging. It was interesting to explore the participants’ diverse narratives and to see how they engage with their Muslimness and/or Canadianness from contrasting locations. Their religious identity and national affiliations are not static, but they shift and change according to their social locations and their positionings. Their Muslimness is performed differently at home, at school, outside the school, with their families, in the country of origin, and on social media. They are constantly trying to creatively manage the conflicting demands of being young and Muslim in Canada. These negotiations are very complex, and the participants showed creative ways of selecting how they position themselves and how to adjust to the varying demands of different youthscapes (Maira et al., 2004).

The study challenges the dominant framework in the studies of Muslim youth focusing on the articulation of identity binaries and highlights the overlapping, even contradictory performances of Muslimness, the fluidity of belonging and the multiplicities of selves and identities (Lugones, 1987). All participants engaged with translocational positionality (Anthias, 2008), performing their Muslimness and/or Canadianness differently depending on the local and global context in which they are positioned. They adopt a variety of strategies of “travelling” (Lugones, 1987) between the different worlds they inhabit. These strategies vary depending on
the local vs. transnational contexts, the outside vs. the inside school context, the real vs. the virtual, the peers and friends vs. the parents and family. The findings highlight that these negotiations transcend hybridity and fixed binaries. When faced with exclusion, racism and Islamophobia, Muslim youth in this research tend to have a closer connection to their Muslimness, as an imaginary of belonging to confront the feelings of loss.

All participants showed a dynamic relationship with their religion; they adopted their own strategies to cope with the religious and cultural norms and also to resist the essentialized identity frameworks of Muslim men and Muslim women (Khan, 2002; Razack, 2004; Zine, 2012). They showed that the process of constructing their identities is more complex than being torn between two conflicting cultures. They were creative in creating their own spaces of comfort, informed by their own selections and choices to construct their identities as “positionings” that are both dynamic and contextual (Hall, 1992). In these negotiations, gender, race and socio-economic status played an important role; the study demonstrated that “Muslims do not reproduce a monolithic Muslim identity. [Furthermore] Muslims’ engagement in identity construction informs us of power struggles that are embedded in material local conditions and global processes that make use of a multiplicity of registers and frames of reference” (Ismail, 2004, p. 631). Their different roots and routes informed how they construct their Muslimness, engage with their Canadianness and perform their youth identities. I argue that Muslim religious identity is not an essence, as it is shaped and constructed within specific locations and through particular forms. However, despite the different levels of religiosity, religion was perceived as an anchor that gave the participants a sense of belonging and a complex form of resistance and defiance to the normalized discourses that demonize Muslims.
Using boxing, dancing, activism, basketball, school involvement, or just being friendly and patient showed the multiple ways the participants tried to prove wrong the dominant stereotypes about Muslims. Muslim youth have to prove that they are normal young people with desires, frustrations, dreams and ambitions. Similar to young people their age, they are in the stage of exploring who they are and what they long for. Like teens their age, they are trying to make sense of the different expectations put on them from their families here and there, to learn more than one language to keep the culture of the far away home and succeed in the present home. The participants showed they were concerned about their opportunities and how to navigate their lives within an overwhelmingly exclusionary context. They were more concerned about their life chances than their lifestyles. They have ambitions to be successful and good Muslim citizens.

The study highlights the role schools play in the process of identity construction and confirms what Fuss (1989) contended long ago:

Nowhere are the related issues of essence, identity, and experience so highly charged and so deeply politicized as they are in the classroom. Personal consciousness, individual oppressions, lived experience—in short, identity politics—operate in the classroom both to authorize and to de-authorize speech. "Experience" emerges as the essential truth of the individual subject, and personal "identity" metamorphoses into knowledge. Who we are becomes what we know; ontology shades into epistemology” (p.113).

This study may be unique in finding that Muslim youth had a positive and empowering experience in school. A finding that brings forward that there are possibilities of change within the micro level of our educational institutions, this school gave these young men and women the chance to see the possibility to be Muslim and to be respected and valued. They believed in their
“brilliant futures” and the possibility to find a space where they can belong. This opens the opportunity to discuss the possibilities of change if educational institutions and educational leaders are aware of the challenges these young people go through and implement a vision for equity rather than tolerance (Gosh & Abdi, 2004). Despite the effort to create inclusive spaces and enhance the sense of community, a lot has to be done. One school counsellor expressed one day that “they do not know anything about these students”, referring to Muslim students, “we do not have any education apart from the things we hear in the media and the social studies”. She was even referring to her limited knowledge about the diversity among Muslims and how the media discourses and policies impact their daily lives. She expressed her lack of training as a counsellor to deal with the increasing diversity of students.

It is important to acknowledge that despite the effort to bring in as many diverse narratives and experiences as possible, the study has limitations. I particularly was unable to recruit youth who identify as Muslims and who belong to the LGBTQ community. Another group that I felt was excluded because of the research design and the use of interviews was the group of recent female refugees who were not comfortable talking about their experiences using interviews. I am aware of the silent voices and the missing experiences that this paper could not include.

I argue that the participants were privileged to be able to talk, brave enough to express their opinions and voice their concerns. The chapter is about these voices that we rarely listen to; the voices of these young men and women demystify the “one portrayal fits all” of Muslim youth, questions the place of Muslims in the Canadian multiculturalism framework and citizenship imaginary, and rethinks the role that schools play in shaping youth identities, belonging and citizenship.
Chapter 5: Can the displaced speak? Muslim girls negotiating identity, home and belonging through photovoice

5.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on a photovoice project I conducted during my ethnographic field work with/for/about Muslim youth in a Canadian high school. The project was conducted during eight months in the school year 2017–2018, and three exhibitions were conducted in 2018 and 2019. The project was granted the Institutional Behavioural Research Ethics approval and received research funding from the academic institution I was attending. This chapter contributes to the limited research that uses participatory visual methods to engage Muslim girls who experienced forced migration to reflect on their identities and their experiences of displacement and settlement. This project was done in collaboration with ten co-researchers/participants; all of them self-identify as Muslim and have experienced forced migration and displacement. The project was conducted during my second year of fieldwork, as part of a larger research study that explored how Muslim youth (aged 14 to 19) attending a Canadian public high school negotiate their identities and sense of (un)belonging to Canada, and how their school experiences impact this process.

Given my engagement with a feminist “praxis-oriented” lens in my critical ethnography (Abu-lughod, 1990; Khan, 2002; Lather, 2001; Nencel, 2014; Visweswaran, 1994), the use of Photovoice emerged from my ethical commitment to include the voices of a group of Muslim girls with refugee background who expressed an interest in participating in my ethnographic research study but were not comfortable with the interview format. I felt the need to modify my initial research design and to make methodological detours to be able to integrate the

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perspectives of these girls who self-identify as Muslims and came to Canada as refugees. The girls were all English Language Learners (ELL); they speak basic English and believed their linguistic skills in Arabic were not good enough to express their opinions. Yet more than the language barrier, they were not feeling confident enough to share their perspectives or talk about their experiences.

Including the voices of girls of refugee background was an essential step in exploring Muslim youth identity negotiations and sense of (un)belonging using an intersectional lens that challenges the overwhelming homogenous narratives around Muslim women and explores the situated, lived experiences of these young women being young, Muslim and becoming a refugee.

5.2 The context of the project

5.2.1 Anti-Muslim racism and the refugee “crisis”

In a global context characterized by media images, political discourses and policies that portray Muslims as an “insider threat” and potential “terrorist”, Muslim youth are navigating their lives and negotiating their identities within very complex and contested terrains. Statistics show that there is a surge in Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims in Canada and around the world (Doyle & Ahmad, 2019; Mir & Sarroub, 2019; Sian, 2018), and visibly Muslim women and girls are mostly the victims of verbal and physical threats (Statistics Canada, 2017, 2018; Perry, 2015). Since the 2015 federal election and the victory of the Liberal government in Canada, over 84,000 refugees have been resettled to Canada. This refugee population had a total of 43% school-aged (17 years old and under) youth, arriving in communities and schools across Canada (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2017). Canada has accepted over
35,000 Syrian refugees since November 2015; just under half of these refugees are under the age of 15 (Statistics Canada, 2019).

Being young, Muslim and refugee in a Canadian public school entails multiple challenges for different reasons. First, “anti-Muslim sentiment and discrimination targeting Muslims are on the rise, and school communities are not immune” (Abo-zina, et al., 2009, p. 3). Second, educating children with refugee backgrounds who have experienced forced displacement is complex and challenging because “refugee children face many unique challenges such as trauma, displacement, PTSD, anxiety, lack of literacy, interrupted physical and emotional development” (Dressier & Gereluk, 2017, p. 4). Third, there is a consensus that schools are not ready and not prepared for refugee students (Hamilton & Moore, 2003).

5.2.2 Researcher’s positionality and the dilemma of “voice” and “representation” in feminist research

“Can the displaced speak?” is a question that echoes Spivak’s “Can the subaltern speak?” (1988); borrowing this expression was intentional because it captures the spirit of this work and the force that was behind it. In her essay, Spivak questioned the “epistemic violence” (1988) that the West exercises on the third world subject; the homogenization of the colonial subjects and the colonial dimension in research as it objectifies the third world subjects, “others” and exploits them. They are used, but they are never perceived as producers of knowledge.

This project emerged from the tensions of my positionality: a visibly Muslim woman, a third world immigrant, a first world academic, a transnational citizen, a naturalized Canadian and a Muslim feminist. Since I started my ethnographic research, I have been reflecting on my ethical accountability and “moral responsibility” (Madison, 2005, p. 16) towards my research
participants, and navigating my research with my dual locations-insider and outsider-entailed multiple challenges and tensions (Miled, 2019). I had to reflect on how my subjective experiences and worldviews have had an impact on my research and research participants and how I represent their voices. I was afraid of being complicit in silencing their voices as “research practices can be complicit in oppression due to their deeply entrenched Eurocentric, patriarchal epistemology” (Subreenduth & Rhee, 2010, p. 331). I was concerned with the ethical guidelines that would frame this research. Beyond my institutional BREB and ethics, like many scholars conducting research with the young refugee population (Block et al., 2012; Rodgers, 2004), I was constantly reflecting on the implications of my research on my participants. In line with Ghaffar-Kucher (2014),

we need to think about our positionality, why we are engaging in the work, the audience with whom we will share our work, and the implications of this work for our participants. The cost of failing to pay attention to such issues is extremely high, as it cannot only compromise the integrity of our research but may also impact the lives of our research participants in unexpected ways. (p.15)

I was also cautious of the comfort of the “familiar” because “when a researcher is working in an assumed familiar territory there is a danger that their findings will be overshadowed by the enclosed, self-contained world of common understanding” (Mannay, 2010, p. 94). Working with Muslim youth with refugee backgrounds was a challenge and a reminder that my cultural familiarity, because of my religion and language to some extent, should not be taken for granted when it comes to the experiences of forced migration and displacement. Being aware of the dynamic, complex and multilayered tensions inherent in my research triggered my
interest in looking for creative alternatives to bring out the voices that, as insider researchers, we cannot hear or do not think even existed (Miled, 2019). In this context collaborative, visual participatory methods are proposed as a potentially appropriate way to address some of the ethical issues that are raised in research involving marginalized groups (see Block et al., 2012; Mannay, 2010, Mitchell, 2011; Saksena and McMorrow, 2019; Kendrick, 2015). I frame this work with transnational feminism praxis and third world feminism (Grewal & Kaplan, 1994; Khan, 2002; Mohanty, 1991, 2003; Nagar & Swarr, 2010), the feminism that transcends borders and boundaries and centers women’s voices, narratives and embodied experiences. I needed to cross the borders of age, migration status, culture, socio-economic and academic status to listen to and understand their voices and I had to listen to the “the participants’ collective self-identified needs and preferences” (Sutton-Brown, 2014, p. 171).

5.3 Method: Photovoice

“Can the Displaced Speak?” was a collaborative project between I/the researcher and ten Muslim young women as participants/co-researchers for the period of a whole academic year (2017-2018) in an urban high school. The use of a participatory action research (PAR) method such as photovoice (Latz, 2017; Suskena & McMorrow, 2019; Wang & Burris, 1997) was intended to gain a deeper understanding of how these Muslim young girls negotiate their identities and their sense of belonging, how they feel about their displacement, being Muslims and becoming refugees in Canada.

Emerging from feminist perspectives (Wang & Burris, 1997), Freirean critical consciousness (Freire, 1973) and documentary photography (Prosser, 2005), photovoice is a participatory method that was initially implemented to balance the power dynamics in the relationship of the researcher/researched and provide the participants with an opportunity to
express their perspectives, feelings and world views. Photovoice started with Wang and Burris (1998) in health research, and in the last decade it became a popular method to use in research with vulnerable populations, especially immigrant and refugee women. It is a method that highlights the co-researchers’ voices and captures the complexities of their worlds. It is a powerful method with which to help underrepresented and marginalized groups think critically about the aspects that influence their daily lives and enhance their self-awareness (Wang & Pies, 2008). It gives a “voice, via camera, to members of communities not typically represented” (Chio & Fandt, 2007, p. 486) and is used for three important goals; first to reflect on and document the community needs, second to create space and opportunities to engage in critical dialogues to discuss the issues and concerns raised, and third, to engage different stakeholders in the community to address these issues and concerns. Photovoice has been increasingly used with youth to reflect on their needs and induce change by informing policy makers of community assets and deficits (Sutton-Brown, 2014). Using photovoice with youth engages them in deep reflections about their daily lives and experiences, shows them the importance of their voices and perspectives, and re-thinks the role of youth in community development (Mitchell et al., 2017). It shifts the narrative around youth as vulnerable, irresponsible and careless, and gives youth a sense of ownership, pride and responsibility. It is grounded in seeing the power of youth voices and the assets they own to understand their roles and explore their inner voices and power (Bastien & Holmarsdottir, 2015).

In the last decade, there has been an increasing body of research using photovoice with immigrant and refugee adult women in Canada. For instance, Sutherland and Cheng (2009) explored in the “Mapping Vulnerability, Picturing Place” project the experiences of women who migrated to Canada in one of two small Canadian cities in Ontario, Pearce et al. (2016) used
photovoice to unpack the experiences of South Sudanese refugees in Calgary and their resiliency. Brigham et al. (2018) captured the immigrant and refugee women’s experiences and learning in Atlantic Canada. “Can the Displaced Speak?” project would be the first photovoice project conducted with Muslim refugee schoolgirls (14 to 19 years old) in Western Canada.

Despite the limited research conducted so far with refugees using photovoice, there is a consensus that photovoice provides a unique opportunity for vulnerable populations to engage actively with their own narratives and to take ownership of their own stories.

5.3.1 The story behind

Thinking of photovoice started with my curiosity to include the voices of a group of girls who always sat together during lunch hour at the same table located at the edge of the school atrium, hidden under the stairs, as if they were trying to disappear from the visible scene. I approached them to seek their participation in my study, then I started to sit with them and initiate conversations that were usually centered around life at school, their well-being, how they felt about their progress in English. Our conversations were always short, limited to a quick “Assalamu Alaikum”, the Islamic greeting that translates to “peace be upon you”, followed by “how are you? how is school?” and the answer was sometimes just a nod and a smile. The constant, heavy silence that dominated our non-verbal exchange was another reminder of “the authority and privilege of the writer and the representer, and the provisional nature of all knowledge” (Swarr & Nagar, 2010, p. 6), and a harsh reminder of my limitations in including the voices that I do not understand and the perspectives I am not familiar with. Those silent encounters made me more anxious about the burden of representation and the tensions of ethnographic knowledge production. The silence was only interrupted in the moments they were
showing me their personal collections of photos of their past and present; photos of their families, their lost homes, of their traditional clothes, food, and even the refugee camps they had lived in. During those moments of communication, I became aware that stories of displacement, loss, violence and hope can be told differently. The moment we shared our personal photographs was an exchange of empathy, solidarity and a form of sisterhood in the making.

5.3.2 The Setting

The project was conducted in an urban high school located in a Canadian city characterized by its ethnic and racial diversity. This school is located in a low-income neighborhood known for attracting refugees and new immigrants. The school demographics show that refugees represent about 15% of its total population and these refugees come from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Most of the refugees come from Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria and self-identify as Muslims.

Navigating my research as a process of collaboration intending social change, the decision to conduct this project came after a whole year of being immersed in the school. I was enacting different roles; volunteer, translator, interpreter and cultural broker, and these multiple roles became my different ways to engage with administrators, teachers, students and parents. My presence at the school was timely because since 2016, the school has received a large number of Arabic speaking Syrian refugee students, and my presence at the school could facilitate the communication between the school and the refugee students and their Arabic speaking families. I gained the trust of the parents when I participated in different events to help the new students and their families understand the school system; they felt a sense of comfort seeing a Muslim woman interacting with their children and supporting them. As more than one
parent whispered to me, I became the familiar Muslim face in the school, who could help them not only navigate the complexities of the school system, but also ‘keep an eye on their kids’.

5.3.3  The Participants

Selecting the participants was done through a poster, snowball sampling and personal contact, as explained in the above section. The criteria were that participants needed to self-identify as Muslim, have experienced forced migration/entered Canada as refugee, be between 14 and 19 years old and be ELL/ESL students. These girls are underprivileged in terms of socio-economic status (social assistance) immigration status (refugees), cultural capital, and language (minimal English and very limited familiarity with Canadian Eurocentric, Western culture). I use pseudonyms for anonymity and confidentiality.

Table 5-1 Participants profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Months/Years in Canada</th>
<th>Language spoken at home</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zahra</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Somali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aliya</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Arab/Middle Eastern</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faiza</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Kurdish</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Kurdish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samira</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Sudanese/ born in Eretria</td>
<td>Eretria</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havi</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Kurdish</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Kurdish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afsana</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Tajik</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Farsi/ Persian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hana</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Kurdish</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Kurdish /Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faiza</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amal</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leila</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Persian</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Farsi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.4  Procedure

This project went through five stages and I was committed to consulting with the participants/ co-researchers regarding every single stage.
5.3.4.1 Phase One: Preparatory stage:

I first met twice with the interested participants to explain the process of the project and collected assent and consent forms from parents. Then I organized several meetings to explain the project’s general framework, objectives, timeline and to decide on the themes that would be covered by their photos; this process took about a month with weekly meetings. I explained the overarching research question of “Muslim youth negotiating identity and belonging”. The co-participants, with my support, identified the following themes and sub-themes to focus on: Identity (Muslim, Canadian, gender, race, status), belonging (home), displacement and settlement, Muslim women in Canada (media, racism, Islamophobia), and the impact of their school experiences on their identities and sense of belonging. After that I initiated a meeting with the whole school staff and teachers to seek support and also to inform them that students would be taking photos. I explained the different objectives, the timeline and the expectations from the students participating in this project. The school principal was very supportive and very excited about the knowledge this project might bring to educational leaders and teachers. Two staff members showed interest and joined the team: the SWIS worker (Settlement Worker in Schools) and the teacher of Visual Art and Photography. The SWIS worker helped with scheduling the sessions and created a WhatsApp group to ensure we kept communicating smoothly, and she also offered help with translation in Farsi when this was needed in the different meetings. The Photography teacher offered a lot of support as we were conducting the sessions in her Visual Arts classroom, and she offered all the technical help regarding the use of cameras, the techniques of photography; zooming in and out, blurring the background, the rules of the thirds and how to save the photo. During this preparatory stage, I showed the participants samples of
photovoice projects, discussed the issues/themes of concern to focus on, got ethics approval, secured funding and we set a schedule for meetings and workshops and provided the equipment (20 megapixels digital cameras and SD memory cards).

5.3.4.2 Phase Two: Data collection

The students were given a period of four weeks to take photographs. The participants were encouraged to capture what would help them express their feelings and perspectives and tell their stories and their own narratives. Each co-researcher was asked to take at least ten photos that would tell facets of her story of being Muslim and becoming a refugee. With the help of the Photography teacher, the whole group learned certain photographic techniques and how to take good quality photos. We had regular weekly meetings to discuss how they were doing and if they needed technical help. The participants decided to take more time to work on their final selection. This stage was extremely productive and engaging as the participants were keen on learning more photography techniques to express their ideas. They were checking with the Photography teacher and helping each other take better photos. A growing sense of solidarity among the participants was noticeable. They were spending more time after school to work together, helping each other to retake photos and finalize their selection of photos. This stage was extended to eight weeks.

5.3.4.3 Phase Three: Data analysis:

The process took about two months with regular weekly meetings with the participants. This stage involved photo selection, photo analysis and writing the captions/statements.

1. Photo selection:
During this stage, each participant had to look at her collection of photos and choose between five and ten photos. All co-researchers captured more than 20 photos each. Each co-researcher was asked to choose at least one photo per theme (identity, home, belonging, settlement, school). We ended this process with 67 photos, which, taken together, represented all the participants and all the themes. The participants used 20-megapixel cameras and learned several photography techniques, and they were able to capture very good quality photos; they also were clear enough to be enlarged to 11x14 inch printouts. From the selected 67, and as we were thinking of the budget available and the exhibition space, another selection took place to work on 34 photos for the school exhibition. The most important consideration was that each participant would have the opportunity to see four of her photos displayed.

2. *Group discussions and photo narratives*

Because of the language barrier, discussing the photos was a challenging stage. My concern was to minimize the discomfort of the co-researchers with their limited English. To avoid this discomfort, I organized small group discussions based on the participants’ preferred language: Arabic, Farsi or English. The analysis was based on adapting Wang’s (1999) analysis framework “SHOWED” and photo-narratives (Mitchell, 2011; Simmonds et al, 2015). In this process the photographs were considered the primary source of information complemented by the co-researcher’s stories and narratives. The two small group discussions were meant to facilitate bringing the whole group together to open up about their experiences. The presence of the SWIS worker to help with the translation from Farsi was very important. The participants were able to exchange their ideas and talk about their photos as starting points to tell their stories. The discussion stage was so important as most of the participants expressed that this was the first time they “could” speak about their experiences of displacement and settlement. I participated in
the different small group discussions, took notes and asked questions about the photos. During the whole group conversations, the selected photos were displayed, and each photographer had the chance to talk about the story behind the photo. Participants were encouraged to use the language they felt comfortable with, but they were making an effort to speak in English. I translated from Arabic to English and vice versa and the SWIS worker helped with translation from Farsi to English. It was interesting to see that the group discussions opened a space where the participants felt more comfortable and willing to talk more about their experiences. I noticed that they benefited from the small group discussions and became more open and confident in discussing their photos. Our loud voices, the different languages that filled the room, the laughter of the girls and the jokes we shared created a sense of reciprocity and sisterhood. There were emotional moments, especially when the recent refugees, mostly Syrians, remembered the families they left behind and the trauma of the war. It was important to remind the group about the principles of confidentiality and the respect of that trust.

3. **Writing the photo statements/captions**

The participants were given the choice to write the statement in the language they preferred. The instruction was to write short captions that give a sense of what the photos meant to them. They all decided to write in English to reach the public. Captions are important but with the co-researchers we agreed that the photo itself should carry the meaning as “our photographs, especially those we choose to present as important data, need to be encoded to be as, if not more, useful than textual descriptions, quotes from our informants, or bar graphs from survey results” (Heng, 2017, p. 5). Given the language constraints of the majority of the co-researchers, many of them decided to get the help of two co-researchers who were more skilled in writing in English.
and showed an interest in supporting their peers. The group discussions helped them see what each photograph meant to its photographer and they volunteered to support their other co-researchers in expressing their ideas. My role at this stage was helping with the vocabulary and the mechanics of the language. A few participants wrote their first statements in their first language, and I helped with the translation from Arabic to English. The SWIS worker translated the Farsi statements. To guarantee that the translation got the message the participants intended, I organized three final meetings where we had a look at all the selected photos, their captions and discussed their meanings and collectively we made a few edits. The process of writing the captions was an important process that enhanced the sense of ownership among the participants and a sense of pride as they saw their voices displayed.

5.3.4.4 Phase Four: Knowledge dissemination through exhibitions:

Preparing the school exhibition was done collaboratively, and most of the work was done through consultation with the participants, the two school staff members and the school principal. The co-researchers were responsible for framing the photos, organizing the display and the reception. They identified the target audience, organized a reception and evaluated the project. The project was also hosted and exhibited in a local university and a local church. The co-researchers were present in the receptions held to open both exhibitions and one of them gave a talk in English about the project and about her experience as a refugee in Canada.
5.3.5  Findings: Stories to tell…voices to listen to ….

For the purpose of discussion, I focus on 12 photos captured by the co-participants to express their views, perspectives and narratives about their identities, home and belonging, Islamophobia and racism.

5.3.5.1  Home and belonging: in-between the “lost” home and the promised hope

It was interesting to see the perplexed faces of the participants when we discussed the theme of “home”. Translating this concept into Arabic was hard given the nuanced multiple words existing in the Arabic language: from the physical building “Manzal”, “Bait” or “Maskan”, the place of rest to the homeland “Watan”, the notion of home is expressed in different ways in Arabic and similarly in Farsi. To move beyond the confusion, the co-participants developed a word map of the feelings evoked by the word home. They suggested several words, such as love, family, memories, but when talking about their home country they mentioned war, separation, destruction, refugee camps. They all expressed that it was difficult for them to capture those mixed feelings in photos.

One participant decided to capture a bridge, where she expressed the in-betweenness, the transition and the move. The lost home is still in the memory and the new home is still in the making.
On one side of the bridge there’s my old home country Syria and my old life, and on the other one is Canada, my new home. The bridge is a transition period. We moved from Syria to Turkey, we were not in schools and we had no opportunities. Our journey to settle in Canada is still in this transition. The path is long, and the barriers are real.

Her photo reminded me of Anzaldua and Keating’s (2002) description of the bridge:

“Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives” (p. 1). The bridge symbolized her sense of in-betweenness, instability, unpredictability, precarity and her liminal existence. She was aware that she is not going to find home but she had to make it.
For other participants, the sense of home was evoked by the small material belongings they could bring with them from the far away home; a teapot, traditional earrings, a traditional dress or a prayer mat. They have been carrying home in their small suitcases. In their attempts to make home, to be re-grounded after being uprooted (Ahmed et al., 2003; Miled & Andreotti, 2015), these small things serve as an anchor holding them to the past home that resides in their memories and the present home that emerges from their hopes for the future.

Photo 5-2 Home, 2019, by youth participant
[reproduced with permission.]

This teapot is a small part of our tradition that we brought all the way from the Middle East to Canada to remind us of our home. And also, to remind us of a family time where we gather, talk, chat and laugh. It is part of what home means to us.
Another co-researcher expressed a strong desire to find home, not to return home, a feeling which highlights a stronger longing for displaced teenagers to “belong” to the new home and have high hopes to overcome the challenges of the transition. Home for her resides in the imaginary of her future, the huge sense of loss of the “original” home, the atrocities of the war and the desire to annihilate her experience in a refugee camp, make this young woman search for a home that would offer her a relative sense of safety and peace. A home that offers her the opportunities to grow and thrive.

Leaving our home country made our vision blurry, we didn’t know what our future would look like. It was so confusing to start from nothing and try to fit in. we are overwhelmed
by the challenges that we face everyday such as language, rules, sense of humor, and adjusting to our new life and to the new people around us. We get sad, we get hopeful, we cry, and we smile. We hope for a better future, for finding home.

For the recent Syrian refugees, their experiences are not homogenous, as it depended on their economic status before the displacement. One participant did not live in a refugee camp as they were financially able to rent a place and she was able to join a private school in Lebanon, meaning her displacement was not as traumatic as the ones who were living in refugee camps. For the latter, the feeling of loss was still vivid, and the memories of the “terrible” conditions, as one participant described it, were still haunting them. One participant was very emotional when we discussed the experience of the refugee camps. She decided to talk about this photo:

![Memories of the Refugee Camp, 2019, by youth participant](image)

[reproduced with permission.]
Suddenly we became refugees, we lost our country, we lost our home, we lost everything. We were displaced and while searching for safety, they put us temporarily in tents in refugee camps. This tent is only one big room. There is no kitchen, no bathroom, no water. It was a painful experience.

The memories of the refugee camp triggered a sense of discomfort that was felt at different levels according to the place and length of that experience for each participant. There was a desire to annihilate that experience, and to annihilate the stigma that comes with it (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). It was that desire to “run away” from those memories and to live a “normal” life that keeps them hopeful and resilient; however, they all expressed that the settlement process was challenging, tough and stressful (Kanji & Cameron, 2010). All participants expressed a strong desire to belong. It is the pursuit of that “belonging imaginary” that gives them a sense of purpose. The Syrian refugee participants in particular expressed a very “positive outlook” that strengthens their resilience (Pieloch et al., 2016) and enhances their desire of belonging. They expressed a strong sense of gratitude for the Canadian government and to their private sponsors. They felt supported in so many ways. Other co-researchers expressed that they were not treated the same way and that their journey to Canada and the process of their settlement was much harder. Syrian refugees received much more attention from the media, politicians and community organizations, and more funding for settlement than other groups (Global News, Jan 19, 2016).

Knowing and understanding the differentiated socio-economic backgrounds, the cultural experiences before displacement, and the media and political context of resettlement is crucial; these factors would impact how these young people position themselves vis-a-vis the new home.
Despite the different experiences in entering Canada, and the disparity in how they settled, the majority of the co-researchers expressed that belonging is a step they reach when they “settle”. Settlement meant to them learning the language and the cultural codes, jobs for their parents, decent housing and mostly being seen as more than refugees, a problem, a burden or a crisis, but instead as future Canadians. Interestingly, most of the photos that represent home to them focus on their present localities and spaces, their current lives, networks, routine, and the new cultural codes that would close the gap between them and Canadian youth their age.

It was fascinating to notice the new cultural norms that they try to embrace, such as drinking Tim Horton’s coffee with a box of Timbits, eating instant noodles during the lunch break and combining a sportswear look while also donning a hijab and letting their earphones hanging around their necks.
I am a teenager, but I went through a lot—I experienced a war, I lost home, lost loved ones and moved to many places. Finally, I am here in a safe place we call home, in Canada. I just want peace and to have fun like any other girl my age.

This attitude shows that adolescents with refugee backgrounds “were found to be actively negotiating and engaging with their new home and are not dwelling or living in the past but are very much part of the present” (Ramirez & Mathews, 2008, p. 83).

In their photographs and during the discussions, the co-researchers expressed the possibility of being connected to multiple homes. They were re-thinking their sense of belonging without being fixed in specific localities, and they showed an understanding of the challenges of
their de-territorialization and re-territorialization. One implication is that migrants continuously negotiate identities between “old” and “new” worlds, forging novel configurations of identification with home in both places (Appadurai, 1996), and out of this experience they create a third space “in minority diasporic communities in the First World, where grounding as a Muslim is significantly more fragile than in the women's ‘home’ countries” (Khan, 1998, p. 470). Despite the challenges, all girls expressed a strong sense of hope and connection to Canada. In one photograph, one participant captured the journey as “stairs”, a metaphor that encompasses movement, transition, and also progress and positive change.

![Photo 5-6 Steps, 2019, by youth participant](image)

*I am a refugee from Afghanistan. Our journey was not easy, we went through a lot, and coming to Canada was a huge step. Every day we move a step and we have ups and downs, but the journey is nice, and I love my new home, Canada.*
Through their photographs, they expressed an intriguing notion of home and belonging that defies the normative discourses of territoriality, the nation-state or the Muslim *Umma* (nation). They presented a novel perspective. Home is no longer limited to a specific space or territory, religion or ethnicity, but “home as being accordion-like, in that it stretches to expand migrants outwards to distant and remote places, while also squeezing to embed them in their proximate and immediate locales” (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p. 518). In several photos, home is “a space in the making” (Nowicka, 2006, p. 82), not limited to the nation state territories but embedded in the relationships and social networks that shape identities and feelings of belonging (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). Home becomes *homes*, the home of origin “a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination” (Brah, 1996, p. 192) and home as the “sensory world of everyday experience” (Ahmed, 1999, p. 341).

Their sense of belonging is also dependent on how they are perceived and looked at. Belonging is not in their hands as one participant expressed in an emotional voice: “I am a refugee and I am a Muslim, and every day, we hear bad things about them”. She used a blurry picture of her wearing the Canadian flag as a scarf, a technique that would translate how she is perceived as not really “Canadian”. Through her photo she brings an interesting perspective on belonging.
Starting a new life in a new country where you don’t belong to is very tough. Being a refugee is a huge challenge. Canada is where I belong today. Where I am trying to feel at home. Wearing the Canadian flag is an honor to me as a Muslim Syrian girl. But I would like to ask you: Do you see me as a Canadian?

Belonging is not only connected to the migrants and to their desire and willingness to “fit in” or not, but also relates to how others define who belongs to home according to specific spatial norms and expectations (Castles & Davidson, 2000). Feeling at “home” and having a sense of belonging to Canada for these young women was not felt the same way; it is therefore important to highlight that there are different ways in which displaced adolescents negotiate their diasporic
existence, transnational belonging and in-betweenness depending on the different resources and different social locations they occupy, especially in relation to race and religious visibility.

5.3.5.2 Visible race, visible religion: The everyday encounter with exclusion

The major concern that emerged from the photos and during the discussions was their religious visibility, which put them as a target for Islamophobia and daily encounters of gendered violence and hate. This theme was so important for the girls who were wearing the veil. Many of them reported on incidents that happened to them or to their mothers, siblings and friends. Islamophobia was described by all of them as the most important factor to impact their sense of belonging to Canada. The participants emphasized that at school, they do not experience hate or exclusion, contrary to other schools according to them, but as soon as they go outside, they have to deal with verbal and physical expressions of hate. Two participants were Black students, only one of them wears the “hijab” and she experiences racism more often. She explained that she was targeted because she is Black first and “visibly” Muslim second. The Somali co-researcher, known for her big smile, her genuine kindness and her positive attitude, talked about the experience of being both Black and visibly Muslim and how she navigates the daily experiences of exclusion and hate.
A smile is a strong weapon that you can use in many ways. I smile to resist discrimination, stereotypes and hate. As a black, Muslim woman I face a lot of discrimination and hate in so many places outside school, especially in malls. My response to these acts is always a peaceful smile. It is part of who I am and part of my personality and character. Smiling is my response to the difficult times that I encounter, the racism I face, and my way of being kind and friendly.

This participant expressed the “impossibility” of belonging to Canada as her color and race puts her outside the imaginary of the Canadian citizen. The intersection of her Muslimness and Blackness makes her incompatible with what “Canadian” identity represents. The racism she experienced has existed for so long in Canada, when in fact “racism is alive and well in multicultural and multiethnic Canada” (Abdi, 2005, p. 58). In her emotional voice, she expressed that she encounters racism within the Muslim community itself. She mentioned instances of
racist remarks she had experienced from other Muslims. This theme was quite sensitive, since the co-researchers belonged to different religious sects (Sunni, Ismaili, Shi’a) and ethnic backgrounds. I was afraid of the tensions that this might lead to; however, the participants were open to discussing the issue and bringing their personal experiences. I was sure that being Muslim myself helped them disclose this internal problem; usually out of fear of getting more backlash and negative representations of Islam and Muslims, Muslim women hesitate to uncover their experiences of racism, sexism and patriarchy (Khan, 1998, 2002).

Another co-participant visualized the act of physical and symbolic violence that targets Muslim women wearing the veil with this photo.

Photo 5-9 Hate, 2019, by Youth participant
[reproduced with permission.]
Muslim women are facing racism and hate. They are not welcome in so many places, and they have been attacked because of their religion. This is causing a lot of stress and a lot of fear. I do not know why many people do not like our Hijabs.

All visibly Muslim participants expressed the feeling of insecurity and being constantly threatened, and emphasized the concerns around the safety of visibly Muslim women. Indeed, statistics show a disturbing increase in the number of hate incidents in Canada where “there were 349 hate crimes against Canadian Muslims last year [2017] across the country, or 210 more than in 2016, an increase of 151 per cent” (CBC News, November 29, 2018). The co-researchers expressed that violence is not only physical, but also carried through the different policies that target Muslim women and the media that represents them as faceless and powerless. They expressed that they were lucky to be in BC not in Quebec, as they heard that a law which forbids teachers wearing the veil was being enforced. The discussion about racism inside and outside the Muslim community was so important for the co-researchers, as it was new for them to reflect on issues of race, visibility and how it impacts them differently. It was a learning experience for the group as we were all engaged in a form of critical thinking that moved us from our comfort zone. The photos, the captions and the discussions enhanced the participants’ awareness of the entanglement of race with their religious identity and how the dynamics of race and ethnicity inform their sense of belonging to Canada.
We talk a lot about Muslim girls/women, but we rarely see them talking about themselves or expressing their opinions or sharing their perspectives. They are only seen as ‘oppressed’ by their religion and ‘victims’ of their cultures and this is not who they really are.

The photos and discussions about home, belonging, Islamophobia and racism led to a deeper reflection about their identities. Despite the common “Islam” they identify with, the co-researchers and I have different cultural backgrounds and diverse historical, socio-economic and
political contexts that informed our religiosity. These differences were even perceived among the participants coming from the same country (Syria).

One co-researcher asked in her shy voice “why do they make decisions without asking us? We are not all obliged to wear the scarf and many of us wear the hijab because we like to wear it”. In her photo she highlighted the prevalence of “silence” in Muslim women’s lives, a silence that is imposed on them for being Muslim and becoming refugees in a secular West that perceives them as oppressed with no agency (Khan, 2002; Zine, 2008), but also, a silence that is based on patriarchal norms within their own communities. Many jokingly talked about how their brothers enjoy more freedom and how they are expected to be more responsible and to maintain their cultural and religious identities. However, they all expressed the support they get from their parents to pursue their education and achieve their dreams. The co-researchers wearing the veil expressed a stronger determination to keep their hijabs, for back in their country of origin the veil was common, it was a normal cultural and religious practice. In Canada, that scarf has become contested and a subject of controversy and it gave them a sense of uniqueness and difference, confirming Rahmath et al.’s (2016) finding that the veiled participants “continue to define the hijab as a positive and rewarding experience. Negative experiences have challenged these women and allowed them to become stronger individuals and spiritual beings” (p. 39). Two participants in particular showed that their “Hijab” is more than a symbol of their faith, it is their “second skin” (Mirza, 2013, p. 10), an extension of their bodies, and without it they feel incomplete, mutilated and deformed. The co-researchers expressed their discomfort that the mainstream discourses around Muslim women are usually centered on their bodies and how to manage their problematic “hijabs and niqabs” (Abu-lughod, 2013; Khan, 2000, 2002; Rahmath
et al., 2016), and all the participants expressed that Muslim women need to be seen beyond the scarf they wear.

Although all the co-researchers identify as Muslims, there was a clear difference in the way they perform their “Muslimness”. The participants showed varied connections to their religious identity and for the ones wearing the veil, they performed their veiling in different ways and for different meanings (Hamzeh, 2011). One participant, who wears the veil, expressed that she feels judged and misrepresented not only in mainstream discourses but also within the Muslim community (her family and friends), as the way she dresses is perceived as not modest or Muslim enough (she puts on cosmetics, wears tight clothes) and not Canadian enough because she still keeps covering her hair. She initiated a novel conversation that challenges the binary of the veil as a form of submission or a sign of resistance. She expressed the tensions that Muslim girls are facing from both worlds and how they need to cope with different expectations. Both camps, the Western Liberal feminism and patriarchy and “extreme religious Puritanism” (Zine, 2008, p. 44), are focusing on what women should wear and what not to wear, both are annihilating women’s voices and choices. This participant interestingly claims her third space, and hybrid “Muslimness” (Khan, 1998); she transformed her veil into an expression of her own cultural hybridity and the way she is “creating a new, fused identity that was both ‘Western’ and ‘Islamic’” (Dwyer, 2000, p. 482).
I am a Muslim girl; I wear my hijab and I like that. It shows I am a proud Muslim. I am also young; I like fashion and modern style clothes. I put on make-up, nail polish and wear accessories and I like shopping. I wish I had more money for that, I do not see any problem wearing my hijab and looking feminine and modern.

The question of the Muslim veil in relation to becoming Canadian emerged in several photos; these photos show that the girls are already aware of their “Muslimness” and how it impacts their “Canadianness”. Previous research showed that “The Muslim veil raises fundamental questions about citizenship, nationalism and diasporic meaning-making, as well as conceptions of freedom and emancipation that are hegemonic within Western feminist imaginaries, interplaying with national imaginaries” (Sirma, 2010, p. 10).
All along the photovoice journey, the girls developed a clear understanding of their positionality and vulnerabilities but also their resilience. It was interesting to see the different opinions among this small group of Muslim women on how they perceive their veiling, a topic that homogenizes millions of Muslim women. Certain participants expressed that they no longer see their veiling as only a religious commitment, but also as an expression of resistance and defiance to the negative representation of Muslim women. A few of them indicated they did not have a choice, but were expected to perform their Muslimness through the veil, others saw it as a necessity to differentiate themselves and prove their “purity”, and still others expressed that they are glad they are not wearing the veil as it would limit their chances of being accepted in Canada and so would limit their life opportunities.

Despite the differences in the way they perform their “Muslim” identity, all participants expressed the importance of faith in helping them survive displacement, transition and the challenges of settlement. It is the anchor that holds them strong and hopeful. They expressed different levels of religiosity, but they expressed a strong sense of pride in ‘being’ Muslim and made a consensus on the centrality of religion in their lives.

5.3.5.4 School experiences: We belong here, but ....

The participants’ school experiences were a central theme. They all share the experiences of interrupted schooling, and coming back to school was an overwhelming experience, filled with excitement, fear and uncertainties. Many arrived at school with no knowledge of English but also no understanding of the school system itself, of its expectations, assessments, curriculum…etc. All participants talked about their first visit to the school, an experience they would never forget. Entering the school was an unprecedented experience as many participants, especially displaced Syrians, had not been inside a formal school for five years. It was so hard
for them at the beginning to figure out how they would navigate this schooling journey in a Canadian high school. Several participants mentioned that they heard about the school from previous refugees living in the neighborhood, and the fact that the school is known for being a destination for so many new immigrants and refugees gave them a sense of comfort.

All throughout the project and during our weekly meetings and conversation, the participants expressed a strong attachment to the school. They expressed how important being a student was to them and how it has completely changed the way they think about their futures, lives and opportunities. School gave them a sense of worth, gave them hope and allowed them to have dreams that a better future can be carved from that space. They all agreed that they felt very safe at the school and they had great support, especially from the school principal. The school has been playing a positive role in enhancing their sense of worth. I was in the school for two academic years, and I was a witness to an exceptional school environment that demonstrates an educational leadership that understands the complexities not only of the students of refugee background but also the challenges that confront Muslim students, especially the observant ones. The supportive school environment helped Muslim students, especially the newcomers, feel safe and able to practice their religion and have certain special accommodations (e.g., no pork is served in the school cafeteria, they can pray at school and have special accommodation during the fasting month [Ramadan]).
“In the school’s atrium I see the different colors and faces. I hear the different languages and feel the different cultures. People are here from around the world and as a Muslim girl and refugee, I feel I am part of this exceptional school. I feel it is like home.”

Despite the support provided by the school principal and so many teachers, the journey of settlement is complex and entails multiple challenges, especially that so many of them joined the school after years of schooling interruptions. The girls expressed the difficulties that they encountered in learning English and especially highlighted that the way they were learning English was not helping them learn fast; they thought it was ‘boring’.
“We are not used to snow back home. It was very nice to build a snowman. I really enjoyed it. It’s also the new language (English) that we encountered. It was new for us and hard and tough, but we have done lots of progress. I can’t wait to finish the boring ELL courses.”

That was a very interesting argument to report to the ESL/ELL teachers, and it opened a discussion with them on how to engage the students’ learning through multimodal formats that would involve the student’s previous experiences and knowledge and build on what they know (see Kendrick, 2015). One Syrian/Kurdish participant, who had just arrived (Fall 2018), was so upset when she knew that she could only spend one year at school because she was turning 19 and she needed to move to adult education. It was so difficult for her to move out of the school,
for she had just felt a sense of settlement and safety, and she found the age regulation so ‘unfair’. This points to the problems inherent in the Canadian educational system that places students in accordance with their age rather than their academic backgrounds (Kanu, 2008). This participant has been out of school for three years.

Photo 5-14 Exit, 2019, by youth participant
[reproduced with permission.]
“My school experience has been remarkable and informative. I have met wonderful people and have made strong friendships. However, I wished I could earn my high school diploma here. But according to the rules I have to leave because I turned 19. It’s hard for me to leave my second family and home. I am so sad about that.”

The different photos that the participants took about their school experiences and the different conversations we had demonstrate the dimension that the school occupies in their lives. They expressed that despite the different challenges that they encounter at school, they keep strong hope that it is only through education that their conditions will change, and they will have brilliant futures as the principal keeps telling them. The whole supportive networks available at school and the relatively large number of refugee students and racialized students enhance their sense of belonging, confirming that ‘schools are one of the first and most influential service systems that young refugees come into contact with after resettlement’ (Kia Keaton & Ellis, 2007 p. 30)
5.3.6 Reflections on “Can the Displaced Speak?”: Impact, possibilities and limitations of photovoice.

[reproduced with permission.]

Sometimes classrooms don’t only have desks, chairs, walls and windows. Rooms have memories and stories to tell. For us each item in this room can tell a story about the interesting discussions, the fun we had, the things we learned about life, art and ourselves. This room is filled with memorable things that none of us could forget; support, love and solidarity.

The photovoice journey which lasted about eight months was emotional, fun and also a great learning opportunity for both the researcher and co-researchers. It was a great opportunity to be reflexive due to the nature of the process. The conversations, consultations and collaboration demystified the elitist conceptions of research (Mitchel et al., 2011). The co-
researchers showed a strong engagement with the project as they felt that it was an opportunity for them not only to speak but also to be heard. One participant, reflecting on the project, stated:

For the first time I was offered an opportunity to speak; it was the first time I felt that my perspective, my story, my voice is important, and people can be interested in listening to it. The photovoice project was a project where I can express myself and get my voice heard and get others to feel what I went through and what other refugees are going through, to see the challenges, the dreams and who we are. I had such a great time taking photographs, discussing with my friends meeting with Ms. (Author) and the group. We became friends despite our different backgrounds and the different journeys we had. We were making decisions, and we were involved in all the steps. It was a great moment when we organized the school exhibition. From being an “unknown” refugee, we became at the center of the school, showing our work to everybody and feeling proud that we are able to speak through photographs. I could hear my friends’ voice through their photos, I could understand what they go through. This project created a strong connection between the whole group. This project gave me a chance to reflect on my life, my journey and my identity and it gave an opportunity to the others to see us and listen to us. (participant)

The participants found that the photovoice project changed their school “status”; the display of their photos and the exhibitions held moved them from the backstage of the school scene to centre stage. A sense of pride was obvious as the school was celebrating them and displaying their work. The feeling of accomplishment became a strong motivator for the participants to work harder on improving their English language proficiency and their academic engagement; it was noticeable that the participants’ capacity to communicate in English improved dramatically. They were motivated to find the right words and expressions to talk about their photos during our discussions and during the exhibition receptions. Expressing their opinions using a visual method allowed them to be creative and able to present their concerns to the whole school community. When they displayed the first photos of their work, they felt a great sense of achievement; they felt they not only were able to speak, but their voices were heard.
Three exhibitions took place; the first one at the school, the second one at the university, a third one at a local church that was involved in sponsoring refugees. The three exhibitions attracted different audiences from diverse ethnic, cultural and educational backgrounds, age groups, faiths, status and citizenship. Several initiatives to support the refugee students at school emerged from the exhibition receptions. Other local organizations showed a lot of interest in hosting the exhibition and in organizing a discussion panel to involve policy makers (e.g., Members of Parliament, School District leaders and settlement agencies). The school community (leaders, staff, teachers, parents) highlighted how the project opened conversations and created a space where people felt safe discussing controversial issues (racism, displacement, trauma, faith). The Photography teacher participating in the project wrote:

The Photovoice project was a pleasure to be a part of. Being part of this project broadened my view about the experiences of the students who participated. I believe this project empowered the girls to use their voices more. I feel they were able to express their experience in a way that words alone cannot do. Furthermore, I feel that all the girls had a sense of pride in the work they did. They volunteered their time to learn more about photography. They were there each step of the way from the planning right through to mounting the photographs on the frames and hanging them to display them in the school. They had a strong sense of community. I loved reading about the meaning behind each photograph. It was an inspiring experience.

The photos used ordinary life to capture not only the daily challenges but also the hidden emotions, fears, trauma, dreams and hopes. A journalist attending one exhibition wrote:

The pictures they took were of everyday things - a bridge, a window, cookies and a particularly sweet portrait of some of the women’s hands. The captions were written by the women themselves and told their own stories of war, loss and violence, but also of new friendships, celebrations and the comfort their faith gave them. (Talitha, The Ubyssey, January 2019)
Photovoice played an important role in centering my research, not only as a transformative, empowering approach, but also connecting people, opening conversations and reflecting on our own journeys. The academic became public, personal and emotional. A member of the audience attending one exhibition wrote:

It’s been inspiring, . . . emotionally thought-provoking. I had tears in my eyes all through the program. A story-telling surpassed reconnecting . . . went much deeper!! Many thanks for your genuine message!

Through the photovoice journey, the co-researchers became more open to sharing their experiences of displacement and settlement and also their lives as teenagers in a Canadian high school. More than just speaking about the challenges, they expressed their survival mechanisms
and their resistance strategies. Through the camera lenses they were looking for healing and seeking recognition.

Using photovoice was an opportunity for these young women not only to “speak” but also to learn different practical and soft skills such as photography, the ethics of photography, teamwork, creativity, and interaction, negotiation and collaboration with other co-researchers and the whole community. Not only did this method allow for artistic creativity, it allowed the co-researchers to see the complexities of the social interactions, the power dynamics and the different injustices that impacted their daily lives as they took an active role in addressing these injustices. It offered them a sense of freedom as they moved beyond the constraints of language to speak about their lives, experiences and perspectives. Photovoice is a participatory method that values the participants’ knowledge, which would enhance the youth’s sense of self-worth and empower them (Mitchell, 2011).

In working with young Muslim women in particular, photovoice offered a rare opportunity to counter the dominant media discourses and create new media forms that break with the homogenizing, colonial and orientalist discourses around Muslim women and refugees. With photovoice the “knowledge is produced not ‘about’, but “with” women in a collaborative, empowering manner that ensures participants are able to represent and understand their experiences through their world view rather than that often depicted in the media” (Pink, 2007, p. 111). It also allows them to resist the internal patriarchal structures that ignore their voices and undermine their contributions (Zine, 2008). The participants stated that through photovoice, they discovered the power of visuals in expressing the complexities and the nuances of their experiences and in making sense of the “messy” social world around them (Sensoy, 2011).
The project also created non-threatening spaces of communication between the Muslim youth and the larger community through photography, and it provided the participants with an opportunity to reflect on the challenges they face and bring the attention of the community to these challenges. Furthermore, this project brought interesting insights as it engaged with “more critically engaged and theoretically informed understanding of the ‘refugee voice’ in refugee and forced migration studies that considers refugees’ emic narratives as situated, positional, and relational” (Sigona, 2014, p. 378).

Conducting this photovoice project, however, entailed multiple challenges. It required generous funding, time, and mostly flexibility and also managing the co-researchers daily school tasks and responsibilities to arrange our weekly meetings. It was also challenging to keep the co-researchers focused on the message of the photos rather than the photography techniques, as I was noticing their increasing focus on the technicalities. There, I guarded against the possibility of distancing photovoice from its critical and emancipatory epistemological foundations and moving it towards a more technical, intervention-oriented model (Call-Cummings et al., 2018). Another limitation is that it was hard to work with a bigger group and to include other voices, given the scheduling of the sessions and the availability of the participants.

5.3.7 Conclusion

This photovoice project asked an important question, “Can the displaced speak?” Over eight months, the ten co-researchers and I tried to find out if their voices could be heard. Conducting a project with young, Muslim girls of refugee background was a necessary detour I had to undertake to highlight my focus on my feminist lens and my ethical commitments. I was cautious of the danger of what bell hooks (1989) calls “shallow feminist politics,” which, she
warns, “privileges acts of speaking over the content of speech,” and that “such rhetoric often turns the voices and beings of non-white women into commodity, spectacle” (p. 14).

Through the different photos, the ten co-researchers engaged in exploring their longing for home and belonging and their Muslimness in relation to their Canadianness. The project highlighted the centrality of race in the construction of Muslim and/or Canadian identity, the impact of religious visibility and also the potential of visual participatory methods to offer marginalized students an opportunity to speak for themselves.

By using cameras, these young Muslim women captured their daily lived experiences of being Muslim and becoming refugees in Canada. They enabled us to see their world from their lenses; their complex experiences could not be seen, felt and shared without photovoice. I acknowledge that without photovoice, I would have missed untold numbers of narratives these young women were unable to tell using only interviews or through textual interpretations alone. The visual-based methods were able to capture the nuances of their lived realities (Kendrick, 2015; McIntyre, 2003).

Through their different narratives, the project showed the situated experiences of displacement of these young Muslim girls and highlighted how their ethnic and racial differences impacted their sense of belonging in different ways. It also demonstrated not only the systemic barriers and the mainstream exclusionary discourses and policies that “other” these women and marginalize them for being Muslims and becoming refugees, but also presented their strategies of survival, their hope and determination to create their home in Canada.

The project calls for the need for a more interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological cross fertilization when it comes to the study of racialized, refugee young women to capture the nuances and explore the multiple layers of the complexities of their experiences.
Using a participatory visual method such as photovoice presented an opportunity to create space for empowerment, ownership, agency and social change (Mitchell, 2011). It was also an opportunity to see academic research as a possibility to trouble the “single story” (Adichie, 2009) and the hegemonic narratives around Muslim women and refugees.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

This dissertation is about, with and for Muslim youth. Given their heterogeneity and the complexities of their experiences and the multiple facets of their identities, I conducted my research using different methodological approaches: auto/critical ethnography and visual participatory methods. From Chapter Two to Chapter Five, I presented varied but intertwined facets of this research study.

I acknowledge that doing research with/about and for Muslim youth is challenging, given the wide spectrum of “Muslimness”, the blurry identification with Canadianness”, the constantly changing global youth culture driven by globalization and the “time-space compression” (Harvey, 1999, p. 15), and the experiences of displacement and forced migration that has impacted a large number of Muslim youth in Canada.

For two years of field work, I was privileged to meet and get to know young men and women who amazed me, surprised me and made me reflect on and believe in the importance of the study. This work was done with tremendous passion and dedication, but was contoured by discomfort, fear and uncertainty. In my last visit to the school, while I was trying to say goodbye to all the people I had come to know all along this journey, I became aware that during the research process the academic became part of the personal and the personal grew to be reflected in the academic. The goodbyes were hard and emotional, with the promise that I would return. The hugs exchanged blurred the borders separating researcher /researched, and the research’s significance became embodied in those reciprocal feelings of gratitude, pride and solidarity. I became aware that the connections, trust, friendship and the compassion that were constructed out of the “hangouts” in the field, the laughs, the frustrations, the pizza lunches, the photovoice
conversations, the chats in the Community Room and sharing the moments of discomfort had turned the fieldwork into “hard work and heartwork”, to quote my friend Omer Aijazi (2018). This strong sense of connection and commitment did not halt when data saturation was reached, funding used up, and fieldwork completed. As I attempted to achieve closure, I became aware that the journey was far from being done; it had only started.

I acknowledge that for several years I had to deal with the uneasiness of researching young people carrying the label “Muslim”, and trying to get them to answer my research questions. It was hard to ask them the question “How does it feel to be a Muslim?”. Probing for responses about how they negotiate their Muslimness and/or Canadianness meant asking them the real question, Du Bois’s (1982) famous question: “How does it feel to be a problem?”:

Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: unasked by some through feelings of delicacy; by others through the difficulty of rightly framing it. All, nevertheless, flutter round it. They approach me in a half-hesitant sort of way, eye me curiously or compassionately, and then, instead of saying directly, how does it feel to be a problem? They say, I know an excellent colored man in my town……. And yet, being a problem is a strange experience, — peculiar even for one who has never been anything else.” (Du Bois, 1982, p. 1-2)

Dubois’ famous and powerful question, about being Black in America in the early 20th Century, is so relevant to the context of this study. The participants in this study are 9/11 generation Muslims, for whom since their birth Muslims have been positioned as a “problem” in the West and they “have never been anything else” (DuBois, 1982, p.2). The discomfort with Muslim practices, beliefs, diet, and dress extended to a discomfort with even their whole existence after

During this research journey sixteen Muslim girls and six Muslim boys - Zahra, Aliya, Faiza, Samira, Havi, Afsana, Hana, Faiza, Amal, Leila, Alisa, Lina, Nasiyya, Sabrina, Fatema, Ayan, Rasool, Ahmad, Ali, Mahmood, Adeeb and Soufi - shared with me the stories of their “strange experiences”, their perceptions of their Muslimness and /or Canadianness and how their school experiences shape and inform these negotiations.

As I am writing the closing reflections on this study, I am thinking of Clandinin’s (2013) argument that all researchers “need to be able to answer the questions of ‘So What?’ and “Who Cares?’ about our studies” (p. 35). So why should we care to know about these young men and women? what did they have to say that was worth paying attention to?

Because of its empirical nature, this study adds to interesting work undertaken by several scholars in Canada and beyond, examining youth identity negotiations and belonging in different Western countries using a range of theoretical lenses and diverse methodological approaches(Abo-Zina et al, 2009; Abu-El Haj & Bonet, 201; Bakali, 2016; Maira,2004; Saleh, 2019; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009; Watt, 2016; Zine, 2001, 2004), and it contributes to our understanding of the complexities of the lives of youth, to Muslim identity and identification, to the emergence and assertion of Muslim-Canadian identity, to immigrant lives and acculturation, to African-Canadian Muslims’ lived experiences of anti-Black and anti-Muslim racism, and to the challenges of displacement and settlement as lived and experienced by Muslim youth. This study also has the potential to contribute to our understanding of the role public schools play in the identity construction of Muslim /racialized and (im)migrant youth and their sense of belonging.
With the long fieldwork I conducted and the different methods I engaged with, this study brings to the forefront the multiple voices and the diverse experiences of these young women and men, and contributes to the existing research on Muslim youth in Canada. I am also adding to the limited research in the area of school ethnography with Muslim youth in public schools, as this is an area where little has been done in Canada.

This study does not only contribute to knowledge, but to the ways we construct knowledge. This study draws on the thought-provoking work of numerous scholars and women of color; Third World and Transnational feminists and feminist ethnographers (Ahmad, 1999; Abu-El-Haj, 2015; Abu-Lughod, 1990; Andreotti; 2011; Anthias, 2012; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002; Bannerji, 1995; Brah, 1996; hooks, 1989; Khan, 2002; Lugones, 1987; Mohanty, 2003; Minh-ha, 1989; Spivak, 1988; Viswessaran, 1994). Inspired by their contributions, I engage with a deep rumination on the colonial, paternalistic and Eurocentric dimensions of “academic knowledge” and add my voice to theirs, thereby advancing knowledge as the work of collaboration, shared pain and hope, “hard work and heart work”, a knowledge that comes out of all our heart beats and shared struggles.

More than its academic contribution, this study changed me personally, moved me out of my comfort zone, troubled my assumptions and helped me to see myself and my life stories through new and complex lenses. It was a moment of awakening to my role as a Muslim mother, educator and researcher.

To wrap up this work, it is important to present a summary of the major findings, the potential contributions of this work, and discuss its limitations and future research directions.
6.1 Summary of findings

The study indicates that utilizing a cultural studies approach overall and being willing to employ critical theoretical and methodological approaches yields a more complex and rich representation of youth identity and identification. As I explained throughout each chapter, I started this work trying to explore Muslim youth identities through various lenses to be able to capture their different “worlds” (Lugones, 1987). This study highlights the layered and textured dimensions in Muslim youth identity negotiations that have been overshadowed by the literature’s focus on the dichotomization between their supposedly essential, pure, authentic minority culture and the more diverse, transient, pliable and sophisticated dominant Western culture.

The participants showed they were involved in a more complex processes of identity negotiations and identifications that challenge the homogenizing portrayal of Muslims, a portrayal founded on the dichotomous representations of the ‘civilized West’ and ‘the uncivilized Muslims/Islam’. This framework focuses on a “cultural argument dwelling on a clash of civilizational aspirations—a battle between (American) modernity and (Islamic) fundamentalism, a crusade dividing the “West” from the Middle East and South Asia, alternatively named “the Muslim world.” (Maira, 2009, p.274).

experiences, the participants have demonstrated that their Muslimness and Canadianness are situated and shaped by the entangled connections of their transnational networks and local contexts. They presented fluid, nuanced and multilayered forms of identifications in both their Muslim and non-Muslim worlds. Their experiences are informed by gender, ethnicity, national identity, class, (im)migration, and language. They are also shaped by the continuum of inclusion-exclusion that regulates how these young women and men are perceived in their different contexts and how far they can move out from the marginal spaces they occupy as “Other”, “alien” and “a problem”.

In this study, I problematize “being “Muslim and “becoming” Canadian. In Chapter Two I mapped the theoretical terrain of my study, brought out my subjective experiences as a Muslim in Canada and highlighted the complexities of researching Muslim youth identities. It was important to set the tone of my inquiry and frame my questioning drawing on the seminal work of Stuart Hall (1992, 1993,1996) on anti-essentialism, Avtar Brah (1996) on diaspora and Floya Anthias (2006, 2008) on translocational positionality.

Through Chapter Four and Five, exploring the experiences of Muslim youth while they are living their daily lives at school, I showed the “plurality of selves” in Lugones’ words (1987, p.14), and the way these young women and men were “travelling between the different “worlds” they occupy. The study finds out that Muslim youth identity negotiations are far more complex than the binary framework, as they construct their identities through different forms of “travelling”/ negotiations using creative ways to harmonize the overlapping and sometimes conflictual demands to adjust and “fit in” in to both their Muslim community and their social lives inside and outside school, to cope with contrasting expectations from their different “worlds”, such as religious, ethnic, national, peers, school…etc, and to stretch the ways in which
they construct their independent selves in their transnational and transcultural locations. Interestingly, they showed that they are not passive and powerless in these negotiations; rather, the participants demonstrated they were engaged in multiple performances of their religious affiliation and national belonging, depending on their context. These performances are not static but fluid, dynamic and changing. I found Maria Lugones’s (1987) metaphor of “travelling” between the “different worlds” particularly powerful in capturing these complex negotiations /travelling happening between the different “worlds” Muslim youth inhabit, from the “world” Muslims are stereotypically constructed in to the “world” they construct for themselves as Muslims and young people:

One can "travel" between these "worlds" and one can inhabit more than one of these "worlds" at the very same time. I think that most of us who are outside the mainstream of, for example, the U.S. dominant construction or organization of life are "world travellers" as a matter of necessity and of survival. It seems to me that inhabiting more than one "world" at the same time and "travelling" between "worlds" is part and parcel of our experience and our situation (p.11).

The findings in Chapter Four and Five showed that Muslim youth are travelling between different “worlds”; the travelling might be unintentional or unconscious, but it was a form of “positionings” that are both dynamic and contextual (Hall, 1992).

The findings of Chapter Four and Five demonstrate that Muslim youth engage with a generic identification of “being” Muslim, but they cannot agree on how they perform their Muslimness, as their individual identities are constructed within familial, social, and school contexts that are intertwined with their transnational ties and the global youth culture they consume and the global media representations that consume them. They also express a sense of
individuality and agency in deciding what to choose in “being” Muslim. The participants express different levels of religiosity, piety and understanding of their connections to Islam, and just as similarly they express different reasons and levels of belonging to Canada.

The study also identifies the importance of intersectionality in the exploration of these experiences. The experiences of males and females are quite different, as religious visibility and invisibility is extremely important in shaping the way they are perceived, treated and positioned. The gendered experiences consequently inform their sense of their ‘value’ and ‘importance’ in the imaginary of Canadianness in different ways. This study confirms Maira’s study findings (2009), although limited to East Indian Muslims that the construction of “Muslimness” is produced by state policies and cultural discourses that tend to frame these youth as “Muslim” actors—ignoring that they may also be working-class, male or female, urban, Indian or Pakistani, Gujarati or Pathan—and give primacy to religion as the key explanatory rubric for the War on Terror, thus evading larger historical and political processes embedded in U.S. empire. (p.283).

The study demonstrated that gender, race and religious visibility or invisibility play a definitive role in the Muslim youth sense of belonging as they are positioned differently within the spectrum of Canadianness.

Another important finding of the study, that was triangulated from the ethnographic methods in Chapter Four and the photovoice in Chapter Five, is the centrality of race in shaping Muslim youth identities and sense of belonging. Black Muslim participants’ experiences and sense of belonging are completely different, as they feel a stronger sense of marginalization as they are exposed to a harsher level of anti-Black racism and anti-Muslim racism. It was noticeable that whether Canadian-born or new refugee, Black Muslims or African-Canadian
Muslims are double alienated, for they face both a subtle yet undiscussed form of racism from Muslim communities, and also a more overt, blatant racism from the non-Muslim community. Ayan in Chapter Four and Nasiyya in Chapter Five mentioned incidents of anti-Black racism within the Muslim community, and talking about anti-Black racism was not easy to disclose for either of them. The degree of alienation and marginalization is connected to religious visibility and race in particular. Visibly Muslim women and Black Muslims are experiencing more exclusion and marginalization, and it is even much harder for Black visibly Muslim girls.

The study demonstrates that “Muslims do not reproduce a monolithic Muslim identity. [Furthermore] Muslims’ engagement in identity construction informs us of power struggles that are embedded in material local conditions and global processes that make use of a multiplicity of registers and frames of reference” (Ismail, 2004, p. 631). The participants’ different roots and routes informed how they construct their Muslimness, engage with their Canadianness and perform their youth identities. The participants’ stories provide a clear indication that Muslim religious identity is not an essence, limited only to “being” Muslim as it is shaped and constructed within specific locations and through particular socio-political, cultural and religious diasporic contexts. It is also informed by crossing the physical and emotional borders that connect them to a faraway homeland, family, cultures and Islam. However, despite the different levels of religiosity, religion was perceived as an anchor that gave the participants a sense of belonging and a complex form of resistance and defiance to the normalized discourses that demonize Muslims.

The study highlights the patriarchal structures that are informing women’s positions both in their insider Muslim communities and also the Western/Canadian context. Both worlds have sustained the oppressive forms of controlling Muslim women’s bodies, lives and voices.
However, the female participants, each in their own ways, developed individual strategies to resist different forms of silencing. Muslim girls are trying hard to break the mold of being oppressed, silenced and passive. The co-researchers in the photovoice project and the participants in the interviews demonstrated different forms of resistance towards both the internal patriarchal structures and the Western Orientalist and neocolonial discourses of saving Muslim women. I suggest in line with Abu-Lughod (2002) that “we must take care not to reduce the diverse situations and attitudes of millions of Muslim women to a single item of clothing. Perhaps it is time to give up the Western obsession with the veil and focus on some serious issues with which feminists and others should indeed be concerned” (p.786). The female participants’ concerns go beyond the scarf, as they are concerned about their life opportunities, resisting racism, safety, pursuing education, securing employment and finding home in Canada while keeping their transnational ties, religion and scarves.

The differentiated experiences of the participants presented in this research trouble the Muslim “single story” that is dominated by the Orientalist imaginary of Muslims, the fear of terrorism and the colonial, white supremacist saviour narratives. It moves beyond the dominant theoretical lenses limited to the “Imperilled Muslim women, dangerous Muslim men, and civilised Europeans” (Razack, 2004, p.129) to dig deeper in the complexities of Muslim youth identity negotiations, religious and (trans)national belonging.

6.2 Methodological insights

This work draws on the work of several feminist researchers (e.g. Abu-lughod, 2008; Chaudhry, 1997; Ghaffar-Kucher 2014; Khan, 2008, Lugones, 1987; Mohanty, 1991; Minn-Ha, 1989; Villenas, 1996; Visweswaran,1994; Yuval-Davis, 2008) that take up research as a process instead of a script, a risk-taking journey rather than a pre-planned trip. They undertake research
as a journey that involves the heart, the mind and the body and engages with reflexivity throughout the inquiry.

In Chapter Three, I presented my reflexive account on my research, the vulnerabilities curtailing my research, the dilemmas of straddling an insider-outsider position, and questioned ethnography, representation and ethnographic writing. I demonstrated in line with several feminist scholars that reflexivity opens up opportunities to conduct research with a stronger commitment to our participants (see Abu-Lughod, 2002; Alcoff, 1991; Chaudhry, 1997; Foley, 2002; Lather, 2001; Madison, 2005; Segall, 2001). From my autoethnography in Chapter Two to the use of photovoice in Chapter Five, I demonstrated that research requires constant reflexivity, flexibility and creativity. It was challenging to research “my people” (Chaudhry, 1997), as I self-identify as a Muslim, using Khan’s (2002) and Spivak’s (1989) arguments for strategic essentialism. Engaging with reflexivity and questioning my positionality and how the power dynamics as an insider-outsider impact my research was necessary for me to re-think my research paradigms and methodological choices (Miled, 2019). I was anxious of the responsibility of representation and constantly thinking “how can we best listen to, work with, and represent the people our work is intended to serve?” (Freeman et al., 2007, p. 30).

My “methodological panic attacks” (Miled, 2019, p.1) were creative opportunities to think of methodological detours and add photovoice as a participatory visual method to my research methods. The use of photovoice was a unique opportunity to respond to the research questions by thinking differently and exploring unfamiliar ways of knowing. The use of photovoice with Muslim girls with refugee background was an important methodological decision to include silenced voices and to offer an opportunity of participation to the most vulnerable among the Muslim youth I encountered in the school. It was a novel thing for me, I
did not plan to engage with a visual participatory method when I started my study, but as I explained in Chapter Three, using interviews would not capture the stories and experiences of Muslim youth that do not feel comfortable “speaking” about their experiences. Conducting photovoice was a learning experience for me as a researcher, and it offered the co-researchers the opportunity to experience creative forms of claiming their silenced voices and to tell their own stories. It also offered me the opportunity to learn, reflect on my work and how it engages with critical ethnography and feminism.

I used photovoice to cross the borders of everyday experiences that separate me from connecting with these young women, to challenge the familiarity of “being” Muslim myself. The project makes a contribution to the rare available research on using participatory visual methods with young, Muslim women with refugee background from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as it brings different insights on how these young women construct their identities and sense of belonging to Canada with the traumatic effects of displacement and forced migration. “Can the displaced speak?” was an opportunity for me and for these young women to develop a sense of self confidence, a sense of pride and accomplishment. We learned about each other and how to care about ourselves as a community. The photovoice created a strong bond of complicity and sisterhood among the co-researchers themselves, as they had the opportunity to talk openly about their dilemmas and challenges and share their stories as Muslims.

The project was also an opportunity for the co-researchers to discover creative forms of “coming to voice” (hooks, 1989) and telling their own stories. They discovered the power of photos as public scholarship that turned them into co-researchers, a necessary procedure to reach catalytic validity (Lather, 1986) in "the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses, and energizes participants in what Freire (1973) terms 'conscientization'" (p. 67).
This research journey was undertaken with a constant questioning of my power, privilege, oppression, positionings, the purpose of my research, my writing and how to maintain the critical in my critical ethnography while engaging with my participants as co-researchers and knowledge producers. This study demonstrates that academic knowledge has to be public, shared, and accessible in different formats. Engaging with the UBC Public Scholarship Initiative was an attempt to move beyond the limited impact of academic scholarship and demonstrate that our academic expertise should be translated into different forms and formats. I was aware of the importance of the work of my co-researchers in the photovoice project and that it should be presented by them, and that their photos representing their experiences needed to be part of a public conversation. I was also determined to present the same work in an academic format.

The photovoice project was part of public scholarship through four exhibitions conducted with the presence of the co-researchers and their photographs, and the academic work turned into a provocative learning opportunity for the public. Those exhibitions were also an opportunity for the co-researchers to feel the power of their voices and experiences, to see and feel the significance of academic research as it changes their positions from participants to co-researchers. They were constructing the knowledge and they disseminated it in a format they could understand and take ownership of. The researcher’s authoritative voice and elitist expertise were humbled.

The same project was also presented in an academic format, and the manuscript is accepted to be published in the feminist academic journal *Women’s Studies International Forum*. The statement I am advancing here, and the contribution I am so deeply proud of, is to defy the elitist, white, paternalistic academic assumptions that public scholarship is not academic scholarship. As a scholar/ woman of color, trying to carve a niche for myself in an
overwhelmingly Eurocentric academic space, I could not do my work without resisting the inherent, deeply entrenched elitist assumptions and practices framing academia.

This study advances research vulnerabilities, hesitations and discomfort as creative processes in a feminist research, and I was inspired by Page’s (2017) rumination on “how it is possible for feminist methods to represent the lives of others, especially when stories fail in the telling, both in providing adequate explanations and in the ways that trauma and suffering can remain incommunicable” (p.150). Researching Muslim youth while straddling multiple positionalities and travelling between different worlds (Lugones, 1987) myself was both hard work and heart work.

6.3 Educational implications

This study is unique in discovering that the participants have a positive experience in their school. Unlike the abundant body of literature available about the negative experiences of Muslim youth in schools in Canada (see Abo-Zina et al, 2009; Bakali, 2016; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009; Watt, 2016; Zine, 2001, 2004), this study presented a completely different situation. The Sunrise Community School was the main site where Muslim youth felt valued and respected. It was described in such terms as ‘home’ and ‘family’. All the participants, despite their difference in terms of ethnicity, culture, immigration and socio-economic status, expressed a strong sense of belonging to the school, an exceptional feeling that demonstrates the possibility of creating school environments that offer students a sense of worth and help them navigate the multiple challenges they encounter outside school, such as racism, Islamophobia, sexism, settlement challenges for students with refugee background, peer pressure, parents’ expectations/restrictions, media representations and systemic barriers impacting their academic and employment opportunities.
Through the findings of Chapter Four and Five, the participants’ experiences, thoughts and narratives demonstrated how educators, school leaders and support staff, such as the Social Worker in Schools (SWIS), can have the power to shake up the status-quo in the micro-context of schools and create positive environments for the marginalized/racialized and vulnerable student.

From the participants’ narratives, photos and interviews, and from my own observations in the field, I identify three major key areas this study can contribute to: a) educational leadership, b) curriculum and pedagogy, and c) teacher education and professional development.

6.3.1 Educational leadership

This research study brings to the center success stories and heartening narratives about school leaders and educational leadership. Here, I am highlighting in particular a form of leadership that goes beyond managing diversity and assimilating racialized students. For two years, I was able to see a leadership style that recognizes difference as an empowering force and educational leaders who go beyond what is usually expected of them. From the findings of Chapter Four and Five, the participants expressed their feelings of comfort, safety and support. These feelings can be attributed to the following factors:

a. Distributed Leadership for care: The school principal and many educators, staff and teachers were collaborating and showed strong commitment to support students. The school principal was using a form of distributed leadership (Gronn, 2003), where staff and teachers were assuming important roles in the whole process of supporting students. There was a strong sense of care among the group of educators and staff I met in the school, especially the ones with whom I had the opportunity to talk to and engage in certain activities and events. I highlight the school principal (Mr. Wittman), the Community Coordinator (Raj),
the SWIS worker (Nasim), the ESL /ELL teacher (Pryanka), the Visual Art Teacher (Michelle) and the Community Assistant (Jeannette). They were all showing a strong sense of responsibility to provide the students with all the support they needed, and the leadership exercised by the principal and the Community Coordinator demonstrated a strong sense of care, empathy and responsibility. His leadership is captured in his declaration that “I am here when they need me”. Mr. Wittman was always present, be it in the atrium, the gym or the Community Room, and was constantly engaging with the students in different conversations, teasing them, laughing and taking selfies with them, and yet always putting high expectations on them. “They are working for their brilliant futures” was a sentence he repeated all the time. He was always available for parents, even though he only speaks English. In Chapter Four and Five, I present examples of how he cares about the students and how he gained the students’ trust. He was seeing what he was doing as a normal way of being that should happen in all schools. His leadership of care was inspiring and created a strong sense of community among the different stake holders. He once mentioned that “all students should be supported, and we need to understand that students are not equal in terms of privilege.” The principal’s argument refers, in non-academic jargon, to the question of equity and equality in educational institutions and the possibility of schools addressing different forms of injustices and oppressions (Tillman & Scheurich, 2013, Kelly, 2012). I was aware that he was leading by example, and always encouraging any initiatives to support vulnerable students.

b. Strong knowledge of the students’ background (cultural, religious, socio-economic, family). In one conversation with the school principal, I asked him about what lies behind the strong support he provides to Muslim students. He said, “simply because they
are targeted, accused and not feeling welcome, and they need to be supported and feel that they belong here, and they have a brilliant future waiting for them if they work hard, and we try to help them do that”. He explained to me that he needs to know the families, see where the students live, know about the students’ hobbies and work to have an idea of how to support them. The connections with the parents enabled the principal and the Community Coordinator to understand the challenges that Muslim students go through, and to gain the trust of the parents. It is important to highlight the important role that a community school can play in the neighborhood, as I explained in Chapter Four.

For two academic years, the principal and the Community Coordinator supported my research, as they were curious and willing to know how the students feel at school and how they could provide them with the support they needed. They showed a strong interest in learning about Muslim students, and how they can support them.

6.3.2 Curriculum and pedagogy

Contrary to the feelings toward the school principal, the study shows that the participants were not comfortable with the curriculum and were frustrated by the absence of any ‘positive’ knowledge about Islam and Muslims in it. They made a consensus that what is presented in textbooks and Social Studies class annihilates the history of Muslims and their contributions to world knowledge. They also mentioned several instances where the teachers were biased and made negative comments that would aggravate the stereotypes around Muslims. Their attitude reminded me of Ozlem Sensoy’s narrative (2007) about her schooling experiences:

In school, I hated Socials the most because they taught me to hate myself – or maybe they taught me to hide myself. We (Middle Easterners) were clearly not significant enough in
the course of world history to be mentioned in textbooks. However, on the rare occasions when we were mentioned, it was clear that the contributions of the Palestinians, the Iranians, or the Ottoman Turks had frequently been, and perhaps in the minds of some still often are, the cause of trouble for “the allies,” and thus have been an impediment to peace in the world in general … I hated the Middle East. (p. 594).

The study calls for a real examination of the knowledge presented about Muslims and Islam, and it is important to engage with a critical historical analysis that takes into consideration colonialism and its impact on what we call the “Islamic world”, and also to examine the contributions of Muslim scholars to world knowledge (e.g. Sciences, Literature, Math).

This study shows the implications of these experiences on the sense of worth and belonging of Muslim youth, and it reminds educators that they need to address these biased accounts in curriculum because the school and/or the classroom is “a central site for the legitimization of myths and silences about non-Western and often non-Christian people. Little effort is made to historicize and contextualize the Islamic world and its relation to the West “. (Kincheloe, 2004, p.2–3)

Another aspect that emerged from the findings of the study is connected to ESL and ELL for new immigrants and refugees. All participants enrolled in ELL classes highlighted how the way they learn English is not helping them improve quickly and it is not helping them with graduation requirements. A surprising finding that emerged from the photovoice project was a considerable improvement in the participants English language proficiency, for working on their own photos and trying to tell their own stories motivated them to learn the language using more engaging formats. In my discussions with the ESL teachers, they highlighted the importance of multimodality and new literacies (Kendrick, 2016). Literacy education and practices have been a
subject of debate in Canadian schools, and the study identified the inadequacy of current literacy pedagogies and practices to support learners of English as an additional language. Scholars working with students with refugee background and new immigrants suggest the use of visual participatory methods, inquiry-based pedagogies, multimodalities, and multilingualism (see Kendrick, 2016; Early & Kendrick, 2020; Early et al., 2015) to give the students a purpose to improve their literacy skills and to see the value of the different knowledges they bring to school.

6.3.3 Teacher education and professional development.

The study took place in a school, and one important factor that facilitated my access to the school is my cultural and linguistic background. The school principal, the counsellors and teachers confirmed that they lack knowledge, training and learning opportunities to learn about “these students”, referring to Muslim students with refugee background, as the language barrier adds to their alienation and inhibits their sense of well-being and belonging to the school community. With a look at the different professional development events teachers had, there was a noticeable paucity of any learning opportunities that would support teachers in understanding the complexities surrounding the lives of racialized youth, in particular Black Muslims and Muslims with forced migration experiences and displacement. I identified elsewhere (Miled, 2019) that educators in the Metro Vancouver area lack professional development that engages with critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism and anti-racist and anti-oppressive frameworks (Freire, 1973; Kelly, 2012, Wright, 2012; Banks & Banks, 2016).

This study confirms the recommendation I suggested in my previous research on teacher professional development as the present study demonstrated the need for

ProD programs that examine the cultural, social and political contexts of schooling and help teachers understand the entanglements of race, culture and religion and sexual
orientation and how they impact students’ school experiences and their opportunities and life chances. There is also a need to rethink the role of universities and academia in this debate and in bridging the gap between theoretical research and practice. (Miled, 2019, p. 14)

6.4 Limitations and recommendations for future research

As with most qualitative research, this study is limited by its scope, which is its detailed focus on one community public school and the experiences of a small number of youth. As I explained in previous chapters, the purpose of this ethnography is to trouble the single story of Muslim youth and to reach the descriptive depth of these experiences so as not to make it generalizable.

Furthermore, this study is limited by my positionality as an insider, despite the long time I spent in the school, for the fact that I myself was Muslim might have discouraged other youth from participating in the study. There was a sense of caution, as I might have been exercising a form of surveillance, since “armed with the language of social science, I too contribute to a voyeurism legitimized by social science” Khan, 2005, p.2023). I navigated the dilemmas of insider-outsider and research as surveillance by unfolding my positionality and my different locations in each chapter. As research is not neutral, and as a researcher I acknowledge that I bring to the study my own political agenda, motive and vulnerabilities, it is through reflexivity that I expose the multiplicities of locations I occupy and how my personal story is entangled within my research.

It is important also to admit that despite the effort to include as many diverse narratives and experiences as possible, it was hard to recruit participants from all the different ethnic, cultural and language backgrounds, as limiting the number of the participants was necessary to
ensure ethnographic depth and thick data. I was particularly unable to recruit youth who identify as Muslims and who belong to the LGBTQ community, for the question of homosexuality is still taboo among most of the Muslim community in the context of school. This is an area that would be an important direction of research that will fill a significant gap in academic research.

Another limitation of this study is despite the multiple encounters with parents and gathering insightful data from them, it was hard to incorporate their perspectives as it goes beyond the scope of this thesis. The parents’ experiences and perspectives on their children’s identities and sense of belonging is important, but the focus of this study was to highlight the voices of the youth themselves.

An important limitation that is not restricted only to my work, but impacts most of educational research, is the absence of data on race and religion among the student populations and the schoolteachers and staff. It would have been very helpful to have data available on the students’ racial profiles and religion and also the racial data on teachers, to be able to examine the discrepancies in terms of school achievements, hiring, firing and graduation rates.

6.5 Future directions of research

There are several research directions that emerge from my study. The following suggestions span multiple research terrains, such as Youth Studies, Cultural Studies, Educational Studies, Ethnic Studies and Migration and Refugee Studies, and engage with a range of methods and methodologies. The study explores the differentiated experiences of Muslim youth in Canadian schools, and it is important to note that given the diversity of Muslim youth, it is vital to conduct more ethnographic studies and identify differences and similarities through a comparative study of Muslim youth’s school experiences in various Canadian cities (Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal and Edmonton) using ethnographic methods. It is important to examine how different or similar are the experiences, and
how these experience impact academic achievement, employability and socio-economic status. This is important to inform educational policy and educational leadership.

The study also calls for a comparative ethnographic study that compares the school experiences of Muslim youth in Canada, the USA and Europe.

This study would also inform a longitudinal study with the same participants, after four years, to see how their pathways unfolded. Many of them were afraid of leaving the school, and I am so interested in following their experiences, education and opportunities after high school.

Another suggestion is conducting a multi-site ethnographic study of Muslim youth with refugee background to explore their settlement process by focusing on their integration in schools.

Given my interest in literacy in relation to identity, I would recommend research projects that explore the effectiveness of using multimodality and visual methodologies to enhance literacy among students with refugee background and new immigrants.

An important area that I find necessary to explore is comparing Muslim Black youth academic achievements in Canada, the USA and Europe, in order to identify how these Black youth are positioned within different discourses of multiculturalism.

6.6 Reflecting back…. Moving backward

I am writing this last chapter during the Covid-19 pandemic, confined at home and trying to make sense of the non-sense I am watching on the TV News channels. I feel pain and anger because of George Floyd’s tragic death, an unarmed Black man murdered by a police officer (The Guardian, May 29, 2020). I feel pain and anger reading about a “Muslim teen ‘punched repeatedly during alleged hate crime on transit’ in Vancouver (CTV News, June 1, 2020). I am in pain and anger seeing the increasing attacks on our Asian friends and neighbors (CTV News, May 20, 2020). I am in pain and anger when I read a report of the provincial investigation of the
xenophobic and racist Peel School District in Canada, confirming that “black youth, especially males, are disproportionally represented in suspension, expulsions, exclusions and streaming” (The Pointer, May 27, 2020) and that Canadian schools used to celebrate “Slave Day” (Global News, June 10, 2020). I am in pain and anger when I read about a school principal in a Canadian high school commenting that Muslim students should not enroll in Science classes, so they will not learn how to make bombs. (City News, May 28, 2020). It is important to mention that all these emotional, verbal and physical assaults happened within two weeks.

Hard to process and understand what can happen for all people of color, hard to believe that they will have “brilliant futures”, for how can young people - my children, my study participants, all the young women and men I met and meet every day - make sense of the danger surrounding their existence, their breath, their life chances and opportunities?

The memory of George Floyd dying under the knee of a White policeman, his eyes seeking desperately for help while his silenced voice begs for a breath is haunting me. I have been thinking of Nasiyya, Fatema, Ali, Soufi, Ayan and all the Black Muslim youth I met during my research, wondering how they feel and how they could survive seeing a brother being suffocated, murdered and killed just because he was Black. I remembered Ali telling me “I was always the bad boy, the troublemaker and always accused of all the wrong things”, and Nasiyya saying with a sigh, “it's very tough being a Muslim at this time, at this particular time, it is even harder to be both Black and Muslim in Canada”. I remembered the pain on their faces, their shaken bodies and their brave smiles trying to hide those moments of vulnerability.

Confined at home and trying to make sense of the non-sense of racism, of anti-Black racism, anti-Muslim racism, anti-Asian racism and their historical roots and neo-colonial manifestations, it is hard to write, think and hope.
Hard to feel powerless, hard to admit that our schools and universities have failed to create a better world for future generations. Hard to realize that most of our educational institutions, schools and universities have maintained the status-quo and failed the “Other” and has continued to keep them at the margins. Hard to admit that Mr. Wittmann, Raj, Nasim, Pryanka and Michelle are rare humans, rare educators who believed in the right of these young women and men to dream of a better future. Despite the overwhelmingly depressing reality, my study found that there is a glimpse of hope and that this hope is in the hands of educators who can make a difference in the lives of these young women and men, in the lives of Black, Muslim, refugees and immigrants. This dissertation is an opportunity to travel to their worlds, get closer to who they are as humans, in all their (im)perfections.

Photo 6-1 Love is in the community, February 2019, by youth participant
This photo captures the interplay of being and becoming, the different worlds these humans cross, the borders of cultural codes they move beyond. They are deconstructing the labels that confine them in boxes. Decorating their Valentines’ day cookies with “Allah” and “I love you” in Arabic, putting the names of their loved ones on the cookies, connecting their present lives and stories with their memories of the far away homeland, and their persistent hope of finding the home they seek in Canada. The participants expressed hope and showed resilience all the way through this study. I consider this work an attempt to listen to their words and their silence, to feel their pain and share their hope. It is an opportunity to enable the reader to travel to their worlds and simply to love them as “We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking. So, travelling to each other's "worlds" would enable us to be through loving each other” (Lugones, 1987, p.8).

Leaving this work to the reader to judge is important. Writing is a conversation that opens the heart before the mind, and I wanted this work to bring out the heartbeats, the fears, the hopes, the aspirations and the complexities contouring the lives of these Muslim youth. I hope I did.
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Appendix

Negotiating identity and belonging: A critical ethnography of Muslim youth’s lived school experiences in a British Columbian high school

Interview Protocol

(This interview protocol is intended to serve as a guide for the three phases of interviews. I have divided the questions into topic areas in relation to the research questions and to the theoretical sensitizers.)

Thank you for agreeing to do this interview. I appreciate you taking the time to do this. As you know, your participation is voluntary and your remarks are confidential. Having read the Consent Form, you have some idea about what I want to discuss. I intend to record this interview so that I can make sure to get your responses accurately. Before we get started, I wanted to let you know that I will be asking these questions in English, but if you prefer to answer in Arabic, or French, or if there are words or things you’d like to say that you can say more accurately in Arabic, or French, please feel free to use the Arabic or French words. You may request to end this conversation at any time. Do you have any other questions regarding this study before we begin?

Part 1- Identity/Local/transnational/

1. What is your country of birth? OR, where were you born?
2. What’s your citizenship? what is your immigration status?
3. How long have you/ your family been in Canada/in this town?
4. How long have you been in this school?
5. How long have you been in a Canadian public school?
6. Were your parents born in the same place as you?
7. Do you have other family members living here close to you? Or in other parts of Canada?
8. Do you / your family still maintain close a relationship with the country where you were born. (How often do you visit it?)
9. Do you have dual citizenship? Do you have the citizenship of your parents’ home country?
10. Do you share this identification with both your parents? Are they both Muslims?
11. What language do you mostly use at home?
12. Which language(s) you feel comfortable using to express yourself at home and at School?
13. What is “home” for you
14. Where do you feel that you belong most? Why?
15. Do you intend to stay in Canada, live and work here for the rest of your life? Why/Why not?
16. What is important for you to feel at home? Please elaborate on this.
17. Do you feel that you are a Canadian? What does being “Canadian” mean to you? if 
you feel that you are not Canadian yet? Do you want to be Canadian and why?
18. Do you /your family maintain close connection with the Muslim community here?
   How?

Part 2- Globalization and youth culture and identity

19. What kind of music do you listen to, books do you read, movies do you watch?
20. Do you have friends in your country of origin? Do you contact them regularly?
21. How do you communicate? What technologies are you using?
22. Apart from being Muslim, do you share any other common interests?
23. Do you want to maintain close relationships with family and friends in the country of 
   origin? Why/Why not?
24. Do you pay attention to the context in your country of origin?
25. How does your family stay connected? skype? Facebook? Satellite TV?
26. Are you familiar with the popular youth culture in Canada? Music, fashion, sports? 
   Give examples

Part 3- Muslim and/or Canadian

27. In terms of religion, how do you identify yourself? Do you belong to any sect?
28. Why do you self-identify as a Muslim?
29. Is this important to you? Why/Why not?
30. Do you have Muslim friends? Are they from one or different cultures
31. Are you more /religious than your parents? Why/Why not? In what ways?
32. Do your parents pay a lot of attention to your religious identity? Do they urge you to 
   pray/fast/go the mosque/wear the veil…etc.?
33. Do your parents let you have non-Muslim friends? How do you feel about their 
   decision?
34. Do you tell your friends that you are a Muslim? Why/Why not?
35. What is the religious practice that you like doing? Or you don’t like doing? Why/Why 
   not?
36. If you had a choice, would you go to live in a Muslim country?
37. Order these in order of importance for you (e.g Syrian - Canadian – Muslim – Sunni – 
   etc …you can have two words with the same importance
38. If you were asked to use one word to identify you which one would you pick?
39. Do you feel that you can be Muslim AND Canadian, how?
40. How do you rank these two “identities”? If you had to choose which one would come 
   first? Is this a problem for you? Why?

Part 4- School experiences: (Un) belonging

41. Do you like school? Why/Why not?
42. Do you think education is important? Why/Why not?
43. How do you feel at school? Give examples.
44. Is religion important for you? At school? Why /Why not? In what ways?
45. Do you think it is important for you that teachers/ staff and students know you are a 
   Muslim?
46. Do you ever want to hide your identity as a Muslim? Why/Why not?
47. How is your relationship with your classmates (Muslims and non-Muslims)?

48. How do your classmates/schoolmates treat you? Do you feel respected? Do they understand your religion? How important is that they understand your religion?

49. Do they ask you about your religion? What questions do they ask you?

50. Do you have many friends at school? Are they Muslims or non-Muslims? How often do you see them outside of school?

51. How do teachers treat you? Do they ask you questions about your religion? Are they aware of certain Islamic events (like Ramadan & Eid)

52. What religious events are celebrated at your school? Do you celebrate these events at home? Or with your community outside of school?

53. Do you have any courses/subjects where Muslims are mentioned? How are Muslims represented in these courses? How does this make you feel?

54. Are there any events that happened outside your school that impacted you as a Muslim?

55. Were you aware of the terror events that happened in 9/11?

56. Do you pay attention to the news? Why/Why not?

57. Do these events affect you? How do you feel about them?

58. Is terrorism, radicalization and/or Islamophobia spoken about at your school? *(This wording allows for less blame on specific teachers etc.)*

59. Do you discuss issues like racism against Muslims or other groups at school?

60. Do you want to discuss these issues at school? Why/Why not?

61. Do you feel safe at school? If yes, give examples of what makes you safe, if not what would make you safe?

62. Have you encountered any forms of racism or discrimination because of your religious, cultural and linguistic background at school? If yes, did you report it? Why or why not?

63. Have you encountered any forms of racism or discrimination because of your religious, cultural, linguistic background outside school? Explain the event, how did this incident make you feel?

64. What group do you think among Muslim youth encounters more discrimination? For example, is it a particular gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality?

65. Are there things that could be done better at school or at home to make you feel more comfortable/safe as a Muslim?

66. Is there any question you wanted me to ask you and I didn’t? Anything else you would like to tell me that might help better understand your experiences in school as a Muslim youth?

67. Do you have any questions for me?