Running head: MUSLIM-CANADIANS & ARABIC SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

A qualitative inquiry of five Muslim Canadian's perceptions of their experiences and reflections as Arabic second language learners

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Abstract

This qualitative inquiry focuses on the perceptions and reflections of five Muslim-Canadians who studied Arabic as a second language in Egypt or Syria. I conducted in-depth, conversational interviews with each participant and audio recorded face-to-face or telephone interviews to develop both a collective and individual understanding of their perceptions of learning Arabic as a second language in a study-abroad context. This inquiry aims to understand whether their Muslim-Canadian identities contributed to their investment in learning Arabic, and if their Arabic language learning experiences contributed in any way to their religious identity or their religious practices. The five participants planned their study abroad trips to Egypt or Syria in order to learn the classical form of Arabic and to learn the Quran in order to gain a deeper understanding of their Islamic faith. Findings showed that Arabic aided in their ability to carry out their religious practices such as praying and gaining knowledge. This research has implications for normalizing the ideologies and practices of Muslims, which are often seen by the West and through media images as 'strange' or 'foreign'. Understanding and recognizing the various ways Muslim-Canadians develop their identities and practice their beliefs may enable educators, identity researchers, second language educators, and academic institutions to meet the rising academic and personal needs of this growing population in North America.

Résumé

Cette enquête qualitative porte sur les perceptions et les réflexions des cinq musulmans/es canadiens/iennes qui ont étudié l'arabe comme langue seconde en Égypte ou en Syrie. J'ai mené des conversations approfondies avec chaque participant/e et des entretiens face-à-face ou téléphonique enregistré pour mieux comprendre, à la fois collective et individuelle, leurs perceptions d'apprendre l'arabe comme langue seconde dans un contexte d'études à l'étranger. Cette enquête a pour but de comprendre si leur identité canadienne musulmane a contribué à l'investissement de l'apprentissage de la langue arabe, et si cette expérience, en aucune façon, à influencée leur identité ou leurs pratiques religieuses. Les cinq participants/es ont planifié leur étude à l'étranger, en Égypte ou en Syrie, afin d'y apprendre la forme classique de la langue arabe et du Coran dans le but d'y acquérir une meilleure compréhension de leur foi islamique. L'acquisition de l'arabe les a aidés dans leur capacité à mener à bien pratiquer comme la prière et l'acquisition de connaissances religieuses. Leur raison pour étudier l'arabe à l'étranger était le résultat du manque de cours d'arabe classique adéquats sur place. Cette recherche a pour but de montrer que les idéologies et les pratiques des musulmans, souvent considérés comme «étranges» ou «étrangères» sont banales et ordinaires. Cette étude permettra de comprendre et d'identifier les différentes façons que les musulmans/es canadiens/iennes développent leur identité et pratique religieuse, qui permettra aux éducateurs/trices, aux chercheurs/euses d'identité, enseignants/es de langues secondes et des établissements académiques à mieux répondre aux besoins scolaires et personnels croissants de cette population grandissante.

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Prologue

I begin this thesis by describing my experiences as a first generation Muslim-Canadian as they relate to my Arabic heritage language and contribute to my interest and motivation to focus on a thesis concerning second language learning and religious identity.

My Linguistic and Religious Background

I grew up in a home where I was taught religion from a very young age. Religious observance was practiced on a daily basis; we read and memorized the Quran, prayed five times a day, and recited the religious utterances that come naturally to many Muslims such as saying Bismillah (In the name of God) before eating, or Alhamdulillah (Praise be to God) after sneezing. In my family these rituals were always performed in Arabic, contrary to other Muslims who may pray or read the Quran in their own heritage language, such as Turkish, Urdu, or Farsi. Because my father is of Syrian origin, in our home all religious observances were taught in Arabic, which is my father's mother tongue and the language in which he learned his faith. My sister and I were taught to memorize chapters of the Quran in Arabic; and we read the English translation written beside the Arabic script to gain an understanding of what we had just memorized. We did not know Arabic well enough to understand the Quran only in Arabic. We also did not read or write in Arabic, so all memorizing was done by listening to our father recite verse by verse and repeating after him until we knew the verses by heart. Although we were taught religious rituals and practices in Arabic, we never spoke Arabic at home or anywhere else. Thus we were never formally taught Arabic.

We were taught Arabic for the purpose of religious observance only, not for daily communication. The way in which Arabic was taught to me did not give me the ability to use the language in every day interaction. Even when we learned to write in Arabic, we merely

copied verses from the Quran into our notebooks. However, I do not believe that memorizing the Quran in this way was a complete waste of time.

I feel a connection to my faith because of memorizing parts of the Quran in Arabic; I feel comfort when reciting the words by memory or hearing them being played from a recording. I enjoy the rhythmic tune and pitch of the Quran recitation by famous scholars from around the world and regularly play different ones in my home for me and my children. My favourite Quran recitation is by Sheikh Abdul Basit ‘Abdus-Samad from Egypt. His recitations sometimes bring me to tears. This was also who my father listened to most often while I was growing up, and for that reason it brings me fond memories of my home during childhood and images of serene evenings during the holy month of Ramadan.

Although I cannot read or write in Arabic and my communication skills are at an elementary level, Arabic is my mother tongue. Until the age of six, I could speak and understand only Arabic. This changed when I entered kindergarten in an English school in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where I was born. However, in 1981, when I was a few months old, my family moved to Lebanon because my mother wished to return to her home country to be close to her family. Because of the 1982 outbreak of civil war in Lebanon, we then moved to Syria where we were raised by my father and extended relatives. My parents separated and my mother remained in Lebanon with her family. My father, sister, and I lived in Syria until I was five years old. We then moved back to Winnipeg where my father had friends and ties to the community. My father felt that raising us in Canada would give us better educational opportunities, and that it would offer better career prospects for him.

My father spoke in Arabic to all of his Arabic speaking friends and family, but to me and my sister he only spoke in English. When my sister and I began to go to school, we didn’t speak

a word of English. He told us that because we were going to an English school, it was important for us to learn English well in order to be successful in our classes and make friends. Looking back, I feel that my father's intentions were good; he wanted our transition into school and into our new environment in Canada to be smooth and he wanted us to be successful in our studies. Like many other immigrant parents, success in our education was always a first priority for my father. However, I also feel that my father was near sighted because losing the ability to communicate in my mother tongue has resulted in my feeling disconnected to members of my family who only speak Arabic, as well as to the wider Arab community. Not knowing Arabic has made learning about my faith and practicing it a challenge for me. I didn't feel the real loss of my heritage language until I reached adulthood and I do not think my father ever considered how losing my mother tongue would have impacted me and my children.

My sister and I would have benefited from going to an Arabic school on the weekends; a heritage language school would have been valuable for teaching us the written form of Arabic and giving us the opportunity to socialize with other Arabic speaking children. There was an Arabic Saturday school in Winnipeg, but my father felt it was more important for us to go to an Islamic Saturday school instead. At the Islamic Saturday school where he sent us, classes were all taught in English except for the Quran class. I believe that my father may not have understood the relationship or interconnectedness between Arabic, Middle Eastern culture, and my religious identity.

I now think my father could have helped me to maintain my heritage language by speaking with me in Arabic at home, and dedicating some of his time to teaching me to read and write in Arabic during the weekend or summer break. Putting on Arabic TV shows at home would have also helped familiarize me with the pronunciation of Classical Arabic, build

vocabulary, and expose me to Arabic culture. I realize that the decision to not teach me Arabic was due to my father's beliefs that English, rather than Arabic, would give my sister and I the opportunity to succeed in our studies, to communicate with and fit in with our peers, and to eventually get a good job almost anywhere in the world. His views reflect the assumption that English is a global language or *lingua franca* (Block, 2010).

Not knowing my heritage language became an issue for me in 2001 when I moved to Montreal. I was in my early twenties and preparing myself for university studies. I was also at a turning point in my life; I began to feel the need to reconnect with my Arab and Muslim roots. Moving to a new and larger city and beginning my undergraduate degree sparked a change in me, and I wanted to learn about my cultural and ethnic background and reconnect with my religious upbringing. I began to make friends with like-minded individuals I met at Concordia and McGill universities. I made friends who came from all different backgrounds including the Middle East, Iraq, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. The majority of the friends I made were born and raised in Canada and were comfortable speaking their heritage dialects. Meeting Arab-Canadians who knew their heritage language made me feel envious and inadequate about my own Arabic language abilities.

I observed Arab-Canadians who not only spoke Arabic, but had confident and secure Arab identities. For me, knowing my heritage language did not only mean I could speak Arabic with proper pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary; it also meant not knowing cultural and social rules, such as how to greet others, what to say, and how to act when visiting people in their homes. Not being able to speak the language of my parents resulted in a loss of connection not only to my family but to my family's history. Through language one can understand the experiences of others, and not having access to Arabic means that I find it very difficult to

understand where my parents came from and why their worldview may differ from mine. After moving to Montreal, I felt that I was experiencing a process of negotiating my identity as a Muslim, as an Arab, and as a Canadian

After being disinterested in religion as a teenager, my early twenties was a time of rediscovering and reconnecting with my faith, and my lack of understanding of my heritage language became a barrier for my thirst for Islamic knowledge. As a result, I feel that I have struggled in negotiating and situating my Muslim identity in the Canadian context. Not being able to attend the lectures of world renowned Arabic scholars opened my eyes to just how much I had lost by not maintaining the Arabic language. Not only was I not able to communicate comfortably with other Arabs I met, but there was a world of knowledge and ideas that I felt was closed off to me. The religious rituals and observances that I perform in Arabic are practiced out of habit and imitation and lack the true spirituality and essence I wish it had. The Arabic words come out of my mouth mechanically without real meaning or deep understanding. For this reason, I feel that my prayers, which are the way Muslims keep in constant communication with God, lack merit and value. I think that if I understood Arabic, I would be able to connect strongly with the words and scriptures I recite on a daily basis, and as a result feel a stronger connection to my faith and Muslim identity.

Growing up, learning my faith was emphasized more than learning my heritage language, but just how interconnected are religion and language? How have people constructed or negotiated their Muslim identity through the learning and use of the Arabic language? These are the questions I hope to answer through this research.

In this brief account of my experiences growing up as a Muslim-Arab-Canadian, I have shown how the loss of my heritage language has influenced my identity as a Muslim and feelings

of belonging to the Muslim and Middle Eastern community. This provides a backdrop for my inquiry.

Chapter 1: Setting the Scene

"I am still struggling to know and to know what it means to know." (Babul, 2008, p. 42)

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the focus of my inquiry of five Muslim-Canadians studying Arabic as a second language in Egypt or Syria. I discuss the purpose and my motivation for this inquiry. I also present my research questions, major themes, and define the relevant terms and concepts that frame this inquiry.

Focus of My Inquiry

My personal experience as a Muslim-Canadian motivated me to focus on the identities of Muslim-Canadians' identities. Muslim-Canadians face issues of adaptation in North America because they are often misunderstood by Westerners. In a pluralistic society such as Canada, it is becoming increasingly important to understand the beliefs and traditions of minorities, including their ethnic, religious, linguistic, and racial backgrounds. My study stems from my view that a language provides an insightful representation of a culture and its people (Bosher, 1997; Geertz, 1973; Norton, 1997). My aim is to draw on the connections between language and identity (Cummins, 1996; Gee, 2001; Maguire & Graves, 2001; Norton, 1997; Rampton, 1997a), as well as religious practices and affiliations**.**

I interviewed five Muslim-Canadians who studied Arabic as a second language in the Middle East, specifically Egypt or Syria. I interviewed each participant individually in order to gain both an individual and a collective understanding of the motivations and experiences of Muslim-Canadians studying Arabic abroad. Each participant is Muslim by birth. However, not all of them received a religious education growing up. Some learned to pray as children, others did not. Some did not begin to practice their religion until they were teenagers or adults. None

of them learned to speak, read, or write in Arabic when they were children. Two participants had Arabic relatives so they could understand a few words in Arabic. Some participants were taught to read and memorize the Quran in Arabic as a child, but similar to my experiences, they could not understand the words. Four participants were born in Canada; one immigrated to Canada with her family when she was in grade school. English is the language they are all the most comfortable speaking and use most often. Although these participants come from varying ethnic backgrounds, they all considered themselves to be practicing Muslims at the time of our interviews, and each one aspired to learn Arabic in their teenage or adult lives. I interviewed four of them face-to-face and one of them over the telephone during the months of July and August 2011.

I consider myself to be a moderately practicing Sunni Muslim. I wear the Islamic veil, the hijab. I actively engage in learning about my faith and try to teach it as best as I can to my three children. I teach them to recognize and appreciate the miracles found in the natural world around us, read Islamic stories about manners, and I teach them about important figures and events from Islamic history. I also help my children memorize the Quran. There is no dispute that the Quran is central to the Islamic faith. It is considered a guidebook for Muslims. It describes what Muslims should believe about the physical and spiritual world, the purpose of our existence, and it also depicts stories from those who came before us. For example, stories of the Prophet Musa (Moses), Yusuf (Joseph), Ibrahim (Abraham), and Isa (Jesus) to name a few, as well as the Virgin Mariam (Mary) and Asiya (the Pharaohs wife).

The two main sects in Islam are Shi'a and Sunni. They differ in historical beliefs and political opinions. The divide between Muslims who created the Sunni and Shia sects dates back to the death of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) in the year 632. The Arabs during that time

disagreed on who would become the caliph, or ruler, after the Prophet Muhammad's death. The Sunni's were the Muslims who agreed that Abu Bakr, who was the Prophet's friend and father of the Prophet's wife Aisha, should become the political and religious ruler. Muslims who believed that Ali, the son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet should become the ruler became known as the Shi'as, which is short for "Shiaat Ali" or "the party of Ali". All 1.6 billion of the worlds Muslims believe that there is only one God and that Muhammad was his last messenger. They all follow the five pillars of Islam, which I will explain later in this section. However, the difference between Sunni's and Shia's lies in their source of theology. Sunnis rely immensely on the practices of the Prophet as well as his teachings, also called the Sunnah. On the other hand, Shia's rely on their ayatollahs or imams for guidance (Nasr, 2006).

It is only a coincidence that all participants affiliate with the Sunni sect. Whether participants were Shi'a or Sunni would not have made a difference to my study. In dress and practice Shi'as and Sunnis are almost indistinguishable from one another. Shi'as and Sunnis both pray five times a day and fast the month of Ramadan. They believe in the same holy book, the Quran. Shi'a and Sunni women also believe in wearing the veil or niqaab (full face covering), and the men sometimes grow beards in order to emulate the Prophet Mohammad (p.b.u.h.).

Muslim-Canadians are an integral part of Canada's cultural mosaic. An understanding of their religious practices and how they actively seek out opportunities to learn about their faith and construct their identities as Muslims is important in helping foster mutual respect and openness to this misunderstood minority population. In the case of Muslim-Canadians, there is minimal academic research depicting their struggles to maintain and construct their identities as Muslims, while living, working, and studying in Canada. This provides a main motivation for my inquiry.

Research Questions

This inquiry was guided by five research questions, which were informed by my readings of literature in identity and second language learning as well as my own lived experiences. The questions are:

1. What made my five participants personally invested in learning Arabic in Egypt or Syria?
2. What were their experiences learning Arabic as a second language in the Middle East?
3. What value(s) do they perceive Arabic to have in their personal, social, political, or religious lives?
4. In what ways, if any, has learning Arabic solidified their feelings of belonging to the Islamic faith or to the Muslim community that they affiliate themselves with?
5. How has learning Arabic changed the way they view themselves as Muslims?

Terminology and Concepts

In this section I define, explain, and situate the terminology and concepts I used in this inquiry.

Middle Eastern or *Arab* refers to someone who was born in the Middle East and/or has citizenship in an Arab country. *Arab-Canadian* describes someone who is born in Canada, but is ethnically Middle Eastern or Arab.

I introduced the main sects of Islam, *Sunni* and *Shi'a*, above. The 2009 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life gives an idea of the demographics of the Sunni and Shi'a: Of the 1.57 billion Muslims in the world, who make up 23% of the total world population, 10 to 13% are Shia Muslims and 87 to 90% are Sunni Muslims. Of the 21 million people living in Syria, 74%, or approximately 12.6 million people, are Sunni and 13%, or approximately 2.2 million people, are Shia (U.S. Department of State, September 13, 2011). The CIA World Factbook (2010)

indicates that approximately 80 million Muslims live in Egypt, which make up about 91% of the total population. Sunni Muslims are a majority in Egypt, with about 90% of Muslims in Egypt following the Sunni sect.

After mentioning the Prophet's name, it is custom in Islam to send our peace and blessings to the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). We do this by saying or writing *Peace Be Upon Him (p.b.u.h.)* each time we mention his name or someone else mentions his name in our presence. I write the abbreviation (p.b.u.h.) after the mentioning of Prophet Muhammad's name in order to keep with this Islamic tradition.

When learning to read and memorize the Quran, it is considered an obligation to recite the Quran with *Tajweed*. Tajweed means 'proficiency' or doing something well. When referring to the Quran, it means pronouncing each letter accurately and with the correct intonation. The Arabic language is very precise; each letter in the Arabic alphabet has a *makhraj* and a *sifaat*. Makhraj means "an exit or articulation point from which it originates" (Islamweb.net, 2011), and sifaat refers to each letter having unique attributes and characteristics. Learning Tajweed includes knowing the makhraj and sifaat of each letter. Mispronouncing a letter in the Quran can change the meaning of a word or verse; therefore it is incredibly important to learn to recite the Quran with proper Tajweed.

The *Five Pillars of Islam* are five rituals that Muslims are required to perform. The five actions are: the witness to faith (the shahada); prayer; charity (zakat); fasting; and performing the pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj) (Rippin, 2005). I will briefly explain each of these rituals.

1. *Shahada*: The "witness to faith" is the belief and recitation of the shahada, which consists of reciting the following phrase: "There is no God but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God". The statement must be recited in Arabic at the time of conversion to Islam. It is also

recited during other religious rituals such as during each prayer and must be stated with complete belief and sincerity on the part of the person reciting it.

2. *Prayer* is the second pillar of Islam. Muslims pray five times a day at specific times, and every Muslim in the world stands in prayer facing the direction of the Kabah in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Kabah is an immensely large black cube. It is believed that it was originally built by Abraham and his son Ishmael, and subsequently reconstructed by Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). Facing the Kabah during prayer symbolizes unity and brotherhood/sisterhood of Muslims.
3. *Charity* or *Zakat* is the third pillar of Islam. The Quran says, "You will never attain piety until you spend something of what you love" (Quran 3:19).
4. *Fasting* during the month of Ramadan is the fourth pillar. Food, water, smoking, and sexual relations are strictly forbidden while fasting. Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset each day. There are exemptions for people who are chronically sick and on medication, people who are not of sound mind, and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding (Rippin, 2005).
5. *Hajj* or *the Pilgrimage* is the last pillar of Islam. The pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, is obligatory for everyone to do at least once in their lifetime. It is obligatory for those who are physically and financially able to make the pilgrimage.

Motivation for My Inquiry

In this section I will talk about my experiences growing up Muslim in Canada and how these experiences contributed to my motivation to pursue research in the area of language learning and religious identity.

Childhood and my name.

When I was born, my parents named me Susan, because it is common in the Middle East to give children Western sounding names. Western names sound modern and well, Western. When I was ten years old, a family friend suggested I choose a Muslim name for myself. In Islamic or Arab culture, a name can symbolize religious affiliation, lineage, or ethnic background, thus, the meaning of a name is very important. Many parents choose names from the Quran or figures from Islamic history. I liked the idea of changing my name because I had experienced some negative comments from Muslim children at the Musjid, saying "how are you a Muslim if your name isn't Muslim?" A family friend suggested the name Zainab. I liked the name; it sounded nice, it was unique, and no one I knew had it. After we decided on my name, my father went to my elementary school and asked that my name be officially changed on the class attendance lists, and he asked my teachers to now call me Zainab. He also informed all of our family friends of my name change. A few years later he legally changed it on my birth certificate. When I first changed my name, I would answer to both Susan and Zainab. One day, my friends shouted across the classroom, "Susan!" and I had no reaction at all, but then they yelled "Zainab!" and I looked up right away. At that moment I realized I had become Zainab. When my friends asked me why my name was changed to Zainab, I told them that it is because I am a Muslim and Susan isn't a Muslim name. When I was asked what my name means, I told them proudly that it the name of the Prophet Muhammad's (p.b.u.h.) daughter. I can't remember ever feeling Arab at this point in my life, but I knew I was a Muslim and I was proud to be. I enjoyed the activities at the Musjid that my father enrolled me in, such as girls-only swimming lessons, girls-only Taekwondo, and weeklong camps during our summer breaks. I had always known I was Muslim, but I never questioned why or understood what it meant.

Teenage years.

Becoming a teenager was a confusing and difficult time for me. I was caught between worlds. I was Muslim, Arab, and Canadian and learned to play the appropriate role according to where I was and who I was with. I was expected to fulfill my religious practices at home, such as praying five times a day. This included waking up before sunrise to do the Morning Prayer. I also fasted for the month of Ramadan. I remember having to explain this to my friends, and I would say "we have to do it in my religion; it's so we can feel how the poor and hungry feel." I also remember memorizing the Quran with my father after my homework was completed. As a teen I practiced my faith due to habit and obedience to my father. I also had a lot of Muslim friends from summer camp, the Musjid, and Saturday Islamic school, and I enjoyed having friends that I had a lot in common with. I didn't have to struggle with issues like dressing appropriately or having boyfriends, because my Muslim friends were raised with the same values and rules as I was. We weren't allowed to date or wear revealing clothes. My father never asked me to wear the veil, but I was not allowed to wear shorts or bathing suits once I reached my teens.

At 15 years old, I began to disengage with being Muslim and began to relate more to my Canadian and Arab identities. I entered high school and it just wasn't cool to be Muslim. At a time when my friends were beginning to attend parties and other social gatherings, I had to stay at home. I also began to question things like why we can't date or why we pray. I wanted to make my own decisions and have the freedom to go out with my friends. I began to identify more with being Arab, even though I didn't speak Arabic; my name was "exotic", as my new friends in high school told me.

My experiences throughout my childhood, teens, and until today coincide with the belief that "individual identity can shift over time, due to personal experiences and larger social changes" (Peek, 2005, p. 217). I feel that I am constantly going through a process involving the construction, selection, and negotiation of my identities (Peek, 2005). Goffman (1963) argued that the construction of an identity requires us to present ourselves to the world in a particular way and includes both verbal and visual impressions that we leave behind. Vryan, Adler, and Adler (2003) also suggested that we make the choice to present a particular identity based on how we feel we will be rewarded by association with that identity. As a teenager, I felt it was more rewarding to be associated with being Arab than with being Muslim, and that is why I chose to disconnect myself from my faith.

At the age of 17, because of reasons I will not go into here, my father and I went our separate ways and I became independent. In 2001, at the age of 21, I moved to Montreal, and my journey to define myself and understand my traditions and culture became central to my life.

My twenties.

Moving to Montreal opened my eyes to different ideologies and schools of thought in Islam. Growing up I had only known what my father taught me, and I never imagined that there would be so many differing opinions on the same subject matter, such as how women should dress, whether she can wear pants, or wear make-up. There were also so many different beliefs about the spiritual world, and differences in opinion as to whether the descriptions of God in the Quran were meant to be taken literally or metaphorically. The more I learned about Islam, the more I became confused. I began to get frustrated with opposing opinions and people telling me that I should do this and not do that. I believe that I did not turn away from my faith (again) because I had made friends through McGill and Concordia universities, who I came to love,

admire, and enjoy being with. When I expressed my frustrations, they explained to me that the beauty of Islam is that there are so many ways to practice it, and that most of the time they are all correct. As long as the fundamental belief in one God is understood, we can than individually decide for ourselves how we want to practice our faith. But how do I go about learning how to practice my faith in a way that is comfortable for me?

My dilemma.

After coming to Montreal, I became increasingly self-aware of my inadequacies as an Arab and as a Muslim. I was introduced to many intellectual Arab and non-Arab Muslims from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, each with their own ideology or way of interpreting meaning and practice in their lives. To me it looked like they had found a comfortable balance between the traditional Islamic faith and modernity – a balance I began to aspire for. I quickly became aware of how little I knew about Islam and my thirst for knowledge was sparked. I wanted to learn everything I could about my religion. The more I learned, the more aware I became of how limited I was to Islamic thought because of my limited access to original scholarly work on Islam and Islamic history written by world renowned intellectuals such as Abu-Hamid Al-Ghazali (1055/56 – 1111) (Absar, 2011). Al-Ghazali's greatest work opposed the philosophers of his time, who wished to create a divide between religion and philosophical thought. Through his writings, he wished to bridge this divide. He wrote *Maqasid al-Falasifa* (*The Aims of the Philosophers*) and subsequently *Tahafut al-Falasifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*) (Absar, 2011). He published over 100 books in Arabic on issues of fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence), tafsir (translation of the Quran), and hadeeth (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h). His most famous work is *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (*The Revival of the Religions Sciences*) (Absar, 2011). This book has 40 chapters, divided into four volumes, each consisting of around

1500 pages. Part one describes the fundamental requirements of Islam such as praying, and fasting. Part two discusses issues concerning individuals and society; this includes issues such as marriage and work. Part three discusses topics such as the inner life and the evils that may prevent individuals from achieving success in the afterlife. Part four talks about how we can overcome these evils and inevitably achieve eternal happiness (i.e., heaven) (Absar, 2011).

This in-depth and comprehensive piece of scholarly work is significant because it describes the requirements for fulfilling our obligations as Muslims. It also describes how we should interact and be in this world, and then directs us to how we can achieve our ultimate goal of reaching paradise. Being able to read such texts would not only aid in increasing my knowledge, but it would also allow me to be analytical and critical in that I would be able to derive my own understanding and meaning from al-Ghazali's interpretations and go back to the source of his opinions (i.e., Quran and hadeeth). It would also be possible to compare his work to other scholars of his era.

Not knowing how to engage with Arabic text has limited my ability to negotiate my own meaning of the Quranic text. The inability to derive meaning for myself when I read the Quran means that I must rely on what others have interpreted from the text. It is like having a translator or interpreter between me and God. It has also limited my ability to practice different aspects of my religion, such as completing my prayers with meaning and having real understanding of what I am reciting.

In the West, there are Muslim intellectuals who publish great scholarly work. The majority of them are able to speak on matters concerning the Sciences of the Quran, and use examples presented from the life of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) because they have studied Arabic extensively. One example is Zaid Shakir, who was born in California into a family with

African American, Native American, and Irish roots (New Islamic Directions [NID], n.d.). He converted to Islam in his twenties, at the height of the civil movement in the U.S. After his conversion to Islam, he spent one year in Egypt and seven years in Syria studying Arabic, Islamic law, Quranic studies, and spirituality (NID, n.d.). He was the first American to graduate from Abu Noor University in Damascus, Syria. He is the co-founder of and lecturer at the first Muslim college in the U.S., called the Zaytuna Institute (NID, n.d,). Hamza Yusuf and Nuh Ha Meem Keller are two other respected and gifted scholars who studied Arabic extensively overseas after their conversion to Islam. Both of them have translated books from Arabic to English.

I always find myself in awe and admiration when I hear these and other scholars of Islam recite the Quran in Arabic, eloquently with beautiful intonation and pronunciation, or when I hear them converse with Arabs in a local dialect. I feel a sense of hope that I can also learn both Classical Arabic and my heritage local dialect, Syrian and Lebanese Arabic. I hope that I will have the opportunity to travel to the Middle East in the near future and dedicate myself to learning Arabic. I find Arabic to be a beautiful language and I admire people who dedicate their time and effort to learning it. The sense of inadequacy I have felt as a Muslim due to my lack of proficiency in Arabic has been an important motivator for this inquiry.

Purpose of My Inquiry

This qualitative inquiry explores the motivations, goals, and experiences of five Muslim-Canadians who studied Arabic in Egypt or Syria. Through in-depth, conversational audio-recorded interviews, I focus on the multiple ways Muslim-Canadians construct their identities and maintain their religious practices and beliefs through the study of Arabic. I aim to describe the experiences of five participants engaged in learning Arabic for their own personal religious

purposes. The key to understanding and practicing the Islamic faith lies in being able to understand what is written in the Quran. Although the Quran has been translated into many different languages, the Arabic version of it is believed to be the verbatim words of God, so being able to read it in Arabic and understand it is essential if one wishes to connect to their faith on a deep and intimate level. Thus, my main focus is on the connections between language and religious identity and practice.

I have three objectives in this inquiry. First, I would like to bring attention to the reality of Muslims who wish to learn about and find for themselves the meaning of their faith. This is a contrast to the assumption of religious indoctrination, which is sometimes associated with the Islamic faith and other religious groups. The participants travelled overseas to learn Arabic so that they could read and interpret their own religion in a meaningful way; they were not simply believing what they were told or reading others' interpretations of their beliefs and practices as Muslims. Second, I aim to bring attention to the value of minority languages as it relates to the religious lives of Muslims globally, Arabic in general, and Classical Arabic specifically. Third, I aim to offer insights into the religious beliefs and practices of Muslim-Canadians so that their religious practices and beliefs do not seem foreign and outdated. Due to space constraints and the deep complex nature of the Islamic ideology and belief system, I do not focus on any one form or denomination of Islam, but rather explore how the participants have come to understand and interpret Islam for themselves as individuals. Thus, I do not aim to generalize the experiences and motivations of the five participants to the Muslim community in Canada or worldwide. Rather, I want to understand the individual perceptions and understandings of each participant and search for similarities and differences in their narratives. The self reported experiences and perceptions presented are only a glimpse into the values, beliefs and views of

Muslim-Canadians. I want to highlight that Muslim-Canadians are heterogeneous; they are often misunderstood by society and portrayed negatively in the media.

Summary

In this chapter I, described the focus of my inquiry and stated my research questions. I also included a list of terminology and concepts that I use throughout my thesis. I described my motivation for this inquiry, as well as the purpose. In Chapter 2, I describe the context of my inquiry and include a brief description of Egypt, Syria, and language study abroad. I also introduce the Arabic language and its cultural and religious significance to Muslims.

Chapter 2: Background and Context of Inquiry

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the lives of Muslims in North America and show how Muslims are often perceived by society and portrayed in the media as being strange, violent, and uncivilized. Such a discussion is complicated and challenging; a thorough discussion of the lives of Muslims living in the West could be extensive and lengthy. Therefore, I discuss only the issues that I feel may clarify and promote an understanding of Islam and the lives of Muslims. I offer a short description of Islamic beliefs and practices and explain how they may conflict with Western beliefs and practices. I raise the issue of Muslims being misunderstood in the West and I share some cases where discrimination towards Muslims has taken place. I also provide a brief description of two Muslim-Arab countries, Syria and Egypt, which is where the five participants in this study travelled to learn Arabic. I also discuss the relevance of the Arabic language to the lives of Muslims.

Muslims in North America

While Muslims in Canada are struggling with issues of identity and belonging, they are also "actively engaged in individual and collective reflections about how their identities are conceptualized and performed within Muslim communities" (Hamdon, 2010, p. 9). Muslims differ according to their place of birth, country of origin, language(s) spoken, educational level, and socio-economic status. Muslims also have different religious beliefs. For example, some Muslims believe that it is obligatory for a Muslim woman to wear the veil; others may disagree with this opinion. Some Muslims believe it is obligatory for a Muslim woman to wear the niqab, which covers the face leaving only the eyes and sometimes the hands exposed. These varying beliefs and opinions make it impossible to state clearly what Muslim beliefs are without doing

injustice to the diversity of thought and interpretation available within the religion of Islam. It is challenging to describe a "Muslim identity" because the identities of Muslims are "multiple, shifting, and sometimes contested" (Hamdon, 2010, p. 9). Like Hamdon, I dispute the misguided notion that Muslims are a homogeneous and static group. The following section focuses on how Muslims are represented and perceived by society and viewed as "the Muslim Other."

September 11th 2001, brought the lives of Muslims into the spotlight, but sadly not in a positive way. The aftermath of 9/11 was detrimental to the image of Muslims and the religion of Islam as a whole. Muslims were and still are singled out and discriminated against. Some of the experiences reported by Muslims after 9/11 include being detained by CSIS (Canadian Security Intelligence Service) or the police with insufficient evidence and secret trials; being interrogated when travelling to or from the U.S.; facing discrimination at work or when trying to find housing; being harassed in public, and the vandalism of mosques, the Muslim place of worship [Canadian Council for Refugees, October 2004]. The daily San Francisco chronicle reports that in the U.S., hate crimes involving Muslims rose by 1600 percent from 28 incidences in 2000 to a staggering 481 in 2001 (Schevitz, 2002). According to reports by the Toronto Police Service Hate Crime Unit, hate crimes motivated by religious bias and prejudice increased from 17% of the total reported hate crimes in 2000, to 36% of total hate crimes in 2001, and "occurrences against Muslims reflect the highest increase from the previous year" [Hate Bias Crime Statistical Report (HBCSR), 2002]. A hate crime is a criminal offence that is committed against a person or property and that is motivated by

> bias, prejudice or hate, based on the victims race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or any other similar factor. [HBCSR, 2002]

In 2006, Dr. Ahmed Farooq, a Canadian doctor who was boarding a plane in the U.S. to come back to Canada after a conference, was asked to get off the plane because the other passengers didn't feel safe flying with him (CBC News, 2006). A security check was done and he posed no threat. However, he was still not allowed to board the plane. The passengers on the plane were acting upon their perceptions and constructed beliefs about Muslims. Another important case is that of Maher Arar, a Syrian born Canadian citizen who was detained in September 2002 in the U.S. as he was returning to Canada from a family vacation in Tunisia. He was held in the U.S. for two weeks and denied access to a lawyer. He was subsequently deported to Syria where he was detained and tortured for over a year. The deportation was fully supported by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the CIA (Mayeda, 2006). In October 2003, he was released and returned home to his wife and kids in Canada. No links to terrorism were ever found. These well-publicized cases are indicative of the culture of fear that emerged in the post-9/11 era, where people see Muslims as a threat to their safety, lives, and the security of their country.

Muslim Diaspora

The participants in this inquiry were living in Diaspora. All of them are first generation Canadians; their parents were immigrants to Canada. Harsh living conditions, globalization, economic hardship, or war has prompted many Muslims to leave their home countries and settle in other countries, such as Canada. The Diaspora "is a place of tensions, of continuous re-adjustments, a space of fragmentations and of unifying processes, symbolically as well as on the level of social practice" (Saint-Blancat, 1997, p. 13). The Diaspora condition includes the ability to merge the here and the elsewhere, or the local and the global. When talking about the effect of religious practice in Diaspora, identity becomes less about belonging and more about

changing social practices. Diaspora then becomes a triangulation between the place of origin, the country of settlement, and the specific location of settlement (Saint-Blancat, 2002). Muslims living in the Diaspora do not belong to one single community and do not possess one single identity, contrary to the beliefs of many non-Muslim Westerners. However, there are ways that Muslims living in Diaspora help to establish a collective identity. One of these ways is through transmission of religious practices, beliefs and behaviors. These practices are maintained and passed down through the generations. The transmission of such practices and behaviors helps to ensure an emotional and cultural sense of belonging and connection to the larger group of Islamic observers. The second way Muslims in Diaspora help to situate themselves within their respective context is by distancing themselves from their place of origin and from the gaze of the Other that is found in the society that they reside in (Saint-Blancat, 2002). This process can be painful and difficult; however, it helps in the process of re-establishing themselves in a new place and beginning a new life outside of their place of origin.

Challenges For Muslims Living in North America

A distinctive feature of Islam is monotheism – the belief in one God. There are two sources of the religion (*usul al-deen*: roots of the religion). The first is the Quran and the second are the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), known in Arabic as hadeeth and Sunnah (see Chapter 1). Hadeeth refers to the sayings or words of Muhammad (p.b.u.h) and his companions – his family and friends who were close to him while he was alive. Sunnah refers to the actions of Muhammad (p.b.u.h), which were either explained by Muhammad (p.b.u.h), his family, or others who were around him during his life time. Both the Quran and hadeeth were originally written in Arabic. However, they have been translated into many different languages and many scholars have offered varying interpretations of the texts. Because Muslims come

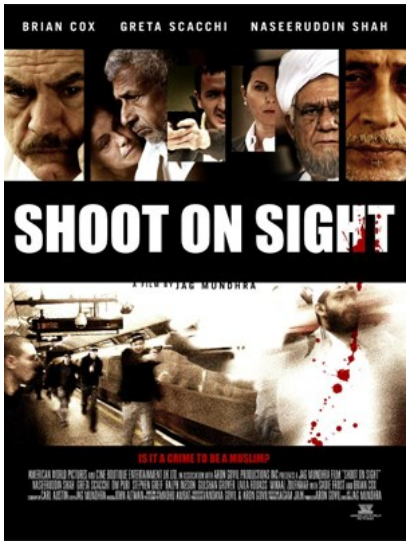
from different cultural backgrounds, and varying social contexts, the interpretations of religious texts are often made through cultural lenses (Akhtar, 2007). For example, the status of women in Islam can be viewed very differently between different countries, social classes, and even between urban and rural settings.

An issue Muslims face in the West is that numerous and sometimes conflicting interpretations of Islamic texts have been made by scholars who have never lived in a Western social context, and therefore are far removed from the realities experienced by Western Muslims (Akhtar, 2007). Communities across North America are plagued by the voices of religious leaders who are detached from the struggles of Muslim women and youth specifically, and the social realities of Muslims in the West in general. The role of women in society and segregation are two issues which desperately need to be re-examined in a Western context. One solution is to recognize and rely on moderate voices of scholars who were either born in the West or have lived in the West for the majority of their lives, such as Zaid Shakir and Hamza Yusuf. These scholars have produced interpretations of Quranic text and other religious documents in a way that takes into consideration the lived experiences of Muslims living in Western countries.

Rigid, uncompromising religious beliefs offered to Western Muslims may make it difficult for Muslims to integrate into the dominant culture; it may also lead to identity confusion. Issues, such as shaking hands with the opposite sex, or negative attitudes towards the lifestyles of others, can both hinder practical living, social conditions, and the willingness of Muslims in the West to associate and connect to other Westerners. Negative attitudes towards non-Muslims may ultimately lead to the isolation of Muslims from the dominant society and in turn may lead to further discrimination and racism towards Muslims (Akhtar, 2007). Berry (1997) argued that when individuals (or a group) place absolute priority on their own values and

do not wish to interact with others, separation between minority and majority cultures can occur. This can lead to even more tension between different cultures and may create greater misunderstandings between them.

Another issue that has contributed to Islam being misinterpreted and misunderstood are the profound impact of the media on the general public. Muslims and Arabs are often shown interchangeably, making no distinction between what constitutes a Muslim and what constitutes an Arab. Images displayed in movies such as The Kingdom (2007), From Paris with Love (2010), and Shoot on Sight (2007) present images of Muslims, usually Arab-Muslims or Muslims living in the West who commit violent, threatening terrorist acts (see Photo 1 below).



(Retrieved from http://ufvcascade.ca/2010/10/25/shoot-on-sight-first-feature-at-ehsaas-south-asian-film-festival/)

Photo 1: Movie advertisement for Shoot on Sight (2007)

Hamdon (2010) has shown clear links between the "stereotypes and monolithic portrayals of Arabs/Muslims and the presence of racism and Islamophobia" (p. 16). These images often "fail to acknowledge the contextual and contested nature of Muslim identities" (p. 16). They also create a social context of fear, hostility, and suspicion of Muslims. Stereotypes of Muslims

are a result of the common belief that Muslims have one single identity, rather than the diversity of cultures, languages, beliefs, and ideologies that exist within the Islamic faith (Hamdon, 2010). The negative ways Arabs/Muslims are portrayed in media have a strong effect on public opinion and the beliefs of the dominant society because there are few, if any, positive images to balance out the negative images. Jack G. Shaheen, the author of "Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People" (2003), studied 1,000 American films and found that only two showed positive images of Arabs/Muslims. Accurate representations and perspectives of Muslims are rare. Shaheen (2003) rightly argued that Muslim identities need to be represented as multifaceted and multiple.

Mooz-Lum (2010) is an example of a positive movie that presents the challenges that Muslim families and youth in the West may face. It is the story of a Muslim family trying to raise their children according to Islamic customs and values. The parents in this movie disagree on how to raise their children, and separate due to disagreements on their children's Islamic upbringing. The children in this movie are trying to fit in with their friends at school, and after entering college, 9/11 happens and the main character faces physical attacks and threats from students on campus. This movie is important because it shows that the challenges that Muslims have faced as a direct result from the events of 9/11 are added to the everyday challenges of Muslims trying to negotiate their identities and belonging within the Canadian, or American context. Young Muslims in North America are bordering on two cultures, with sometimes opposing values. In Islam, pre-marital dating and sex are forbidden, yet youth growing up in the West are confronted with issues of dating and sexual relations at a young age. It is sometimes seen as un-cool to not date. Alcohol is another struggle for Muslims; Muslims are not allowed to drink alcohol or be in the same room where alcohol is being served.

Muslims living in the West have the added challenge of maintaining their traditional practices and rituals, such as praying five times a day or wearing the veil, while being fully engaged within the dominant society. For example, Muslims pray five times a day at specific times, but if they are at work or school, there is not always a quiet and private location for completing prayer. This makes it difficult for a Muslim to fulfill their religious obligations. Similarly, the veil is often misunderstood by Westerners. It is viewed as oppressive and submissive, and it is difficult for some non-Muslims to believe that a woman would want to dress that way. As a woman who wears the veil, I can attest that I love the veil and it is my choice to wear it. It is a part of me and is a part of my identity. Some Muslim women who wear the veil do so as a form of defiance towards the over-sexualization and objectification of women in Western societies. This is not to say that Muslim women are not sexual, but rather that the sexuality of women (in Islam) is for private space only. Muslim girls and women who wear the veil sometimes experience Islamophobia, which is defined as "a fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents that translates into individual, ideological and systemic forms of oppression and discrimination" (Zine, 2006, p. 239). Muslims who wear the veil are faced with the extra challenge of constructing "their identities in opposition to the stereotypes they encounter in the media and in their public school experiences that portray them as 'oppressed,' 'backward,' and 'uneducated'" (Zine, 2006, p. 239). In Muslim societies, the veil is viewed by Muslims as a way to maintain "sacred privacy, sanctity and the rhythmic interweaving of patterns of worldly and sacred life" (El Guindi, 1999, p. 96). In Western societies the veil is often viewed as an attack on the values and ways of life of the dominant society. In Quebec, for example, 15-year old Sarah Benkirane, who wears the veil, was banned from being a soccer game referee after a parent complained (CTV News, 2011 June 22). Although sometimes the veil may pose a safety

concern while playing sports, in this case, the girl was a referee, not a player. Balancing the values inherent in a pluralistic society with religious freedoms is difficult (Zine, 2006), yet necessary for Muslims in the West who want to situate their Muslim identity within that of the Canadian context.

The way people choose to 'use' religion in their daily lives has a lot to do with the experiences, struggles, and issues they have faced in their lives. Childhood experiences, personality factors, education level, and socio economic status are factors that may affect the way someone makes meaning of their religion and applies it in their private or public life. The challenge here lies in the variations of religiosity among Muslims, who 'use' religion in different ways, and therefore may choose to interpret the "fundamental sources of authority" such as the Quran through their own cultural, linguistic, or ethnic lenses (Rippin, 2005, p. 309).

My next section describes Egypt and Syria, two major Arab and Muslim countries.

Egypt

Geographical location.

Egypt is unique due to its geographical location. It occupies 1,001,450 square miles in northeast Africa (Asante, 2002), and although it is located on the continent of Africa, it is considered a part of the Middle East due to the major role it plays in Middle Eastern politics, economics, and culture. It cannot be described as African or Middle Eastern, but rather straddles both worlds. As shown in Photo 2, Egypt shares a border with Sudan, Libya, Israel, and the Gaza Strip (Asante, 2002). It has 1,865 miles of coastline along the Mediterranean and Red Sea (Asante, 2002).

(Retrieved from http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/africa/eg.htm)

Photo 2: Map of Egypt

Country profile.

Since the Muslim Arab conquest in 639 C.E., which was led by General El As (Asante, 2002), Egypt has played an important role in the Middle East. It has played the hand of peacemaker with Israel, and was the first country in the Middle East to be open to the West (BBC News, 2012). The country has ancient pyramids and museums, as well as modern shopping malls and office buildings. Walking down the street, you can see people wearing traditional Egyptian clothing, which includes the abaya (a long robe worn by women) or the keffiyeh (a checkered scarf worn by the men); you can also see an array of modern clothing, revealing the influence of the West.

(Photo taken on my trip to Egypt in 2008)

Photo 3: Al-Rifa'i Mosque in Cairo

(Photo taken on my trip to Egypt in 2008)

Photo 4: Sphinx and Pyramids in Cairo

Although Egypt is considered a democratic country, up until the recent revolutions of 2010-2011, it was run by a dictator Hosni Mubarak who had been in power for over 30 years. A major problem Egypt is facing is the rapid increase in population it has experienced, leaving the country with a high unemployment rate and inadequate income for those who are employed. The population boom has also taken a huge toll on its health care and social systems. It is these living conditions that sparked the 2010 Egyptian Revolution. The center of Cairo has over 8 million people, with another 8 million in the wider Cairo area. In Cairo, you can see remnants of

a history that dates back more than five thousand years, a history which includes the Pharaohs, the Arabs, the Ottomans, the Mamluks, the French, and the British (Asante, 2002). More recently the city has been influenced by Italian, German, Canadian, and American businessmen (Asante, 2002).

The second largest city in Egypt is Alexandria, which stretches for 45 miles along the coast of the Mediterranean (Asante, 2002). It is very ethnically diverse in relation to other cities in Egypt, and the various names of neighbourhoods within the city display this diversity. Bacos and Quartier Grec reflect the Greek community, Smousha and Menasha reflect the presence of the Jewish community, and modern European names, such as Stanley and Lambruco are also found around Alexandria (Asante, 2002). Today, Alexandria is considered to be one of the most beautiful cities on the Mediterranean (Asante, 2002).

Many foreigners go to Egypt to study, work, or have a vacation. Many will go to study at the famous Al-Azhar University in Cairo, or work for international organizations, educational institutions, and embassies (Ghannam, 2002). Both Arab and non-Arab tourists travel to Egypt to enjoy the spectacular pyramids, the Nile River, and the colourful nightlife (Ghannam, 2002). Egypt also attracts students, both from the Middle East and abroad to study Arabic.

Population.

Egypt contains 1.16% of the world population, which means that one in every 86 people on this planet reside in Egypt (Trading Economics, 2012). In 2010, the total population was listed at 84.5 million, a huge jump from the 27.8 million reported in 1960 (Trading Economics, 2012).

Currently, the main influence in Egypt is Islam, which governs the mannerisms, etiquette, attitudes, and behaviours of Egyptians in both public and private realms of life (Asante, 2002).

However, the ancient traditions of Egypt practiced by the Nubians, and the lush customs of the Greeks, Turks, and Albanians can still be found in modern Egypt (Asante, 2002). Most Egyptians follow the religion of Islam, but there is a substantial Christian community as well: One in twenty Egyptians are followers of the Coptic Church (Steele, 2006).

Language and education.

Arabic became the lingua franca for Egyptian people under the leadership of General El As from 639-641 C.E. (Asante, 2002). Although most Copts and Nubians adopted Arabic as their language, some have maintained their ancient language as well. In school, Egyptians learn either English or French along with their regular Arabic lessons (Asante, 2002). Egypt attracts many students of Arabic because it is so well known for its preservation of the Arabic language. Arabic learning institutions can be found all over Egypt and almost every day there is an article in newspapers or magazines about the proper use of the Arabic language (Asante, 2002). Dating back to the early nineteenth century, Egypt developed a reputation for well-known Arabic literature in proper Arabic (Asante, 2002). If an author were to misuse the Arabic language, such as mixing Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic, readers and reviewers were quick to critique the author (Asante, 2002). Both Muslim and non-Muslim Egyptian writers, such as Naguib Mahfouz and Alaa Al Aswany, recognize the importance Arabic has to Egyptian culture, and therefore make it a priority to apply the proper use of Arabic in their books and performing arts (Asante, 2002). Classical Arabic is considered a sacred language for Muslim Egyptians because it is the language of the Quran. Even Egyptians who do not fulfill any of their religious obligations, such as praying five times a day, have a significant amount of the Quran memorized by heart; some have even memorized the entire Quran word-for-word. Egypt is known for its many Islamic scholars, who teach Arabic and the Quran, and Muslims from all over the world

travel to Egypt to study with them. Al-Azhar University located in Cairo is considered the center of Sunni Islamic thought.

Every year, Cairo hosts the International Holy Quran Competition which attracts people of all ages from 114 countries. Competitors are tested on their intonation during recitation, Tajweed, interpretation, and how well they memorized the Quran by heart (Muslim Herald, 2009).

Syria is another major Muslim country, which also receives many foreign study abroad students. I now turn to introducing Syria.

Syria

Geographical location.

Syria shares borders with Iraq to the East, Lebanon and the Mediterranean to the West, Turkey to the North, and Jordan and the Israeli-occupied Golan heights to the South (Standish, 2010). Syria is a part of *Bilad al-Sham*, meaning the lands of the left hand; these lands include Jordan, Palestine-Israel, Lebanon, and Syria (Shoup, 2008). These countries are grouped together because they share much of the same history, and their Arabic dialect is more similar to each other than those of other Arab countries. The dialect of Bilad al-Sham is called *Shami* or Levantine (Shoup, 2008).

(Retrieved from http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/middle-east/syria/)

Photo 5: Map of Syria

Country profile.

Damascus, the capital city of Syria, is known as the oldest inhabited city in the world. Prophet Abraham is known to have wandered through Syria's deserts (Beaton, 1988). According to the New Testament, Paul the apostle had a revelation "on the road to Damascus" and another one on a street called "straight" (Acts 9:11) (as cited in Beaton, 1988, p. 7), a street still found in Damascus today.

(Photo taken on my trip to Syria in 2008)

Photo 6: Entrance to Omayyad Mosque in Damascus

(Photo taken on my trip to Syria in 2008)

Photo 7: Entrance to the Hamadiyya Souk (Market) in Damascus

Damascus, or *Dimashq* in Arabic, comes from two Semitic words; *dam* which means blood and *shaq* which means to spill. Damascus was named after *Qabil* (Cain) who killed his brother *Habil* (Abel), according to Jewish, Christian, and Muslim literature (Shoup, 2008). Another city in Syria, Halab, also takes its name from the Semitic root of *halab* or *halap*, which means milk. This is in reference to the white color of the soil found in Halab. These ancient names have been recorded in the oldest texts known to humankind (Shoup, 2008).

Population.

There are about 20 million people in Syria, with 6 million living in the capital city of Damascus (Standish, 2010). The majority of Syrians (about 90%) are ethnically Arab. Kurds make up about 10 percent (Standish, 2010). Although the majority (70 to 80%) of Syrians are Sunni Muslim (Shoup, 2008), there are a number of religious minorities. Sixteen percent are Muslim minority sects and ten percent are Christian minority sects (Standish, 2010). Other religious minorities include Isma'ilis, Yazidis, and a small Jewish community (Standish, 2010).

Both Muslim and non-Muslim religious minority groups have managed to thrive in Syria because of its typography (Shoup, 2008). They have found seclusion, privacy, and freedom to practice their beliefs in Syria's many mountains and deserts. The Alawites and Druze are two of these religious groups (Shoup, 2008).

Language and education.

In Syria, there is no one dialect that dominates another. Common Syrian Arabic includes regional varieties with different pronunciations of Arabic words and letters (Behnstedt, 2011, Section 5). For example, in Aleppo, the second largest city in Syria, a different Syrian dialect is spoken than in the Hasake, a small city situated close to the Turkish border. The status of Damascus Arabic, which is most often spoken in the capital city of Damascus, varies from the status of Egyptian Arabic in Cairo, in that Damascus Arabic does not dominate over other dialects in Syria. In other words, dialects found in various cities in Syria such as Aleppo, Hama, or Qamishli are just as acceptable to use across the entire country as Damascus Arabic.

In Syria, Modern Standard Arabic [MSA] is held to a higher regard than the Syrian dialect. Compared to Egypt, Syria uses a lot less dialect in the media. Only MSA can be heard in television documentaries, compared to Egypt which uses a mix of the Egyptian dialect and MSA. In Syria, dialect is more often seen in movies, soap operas, or theatre (Behnstedt, 2011). In spoken poetry and songs, Bedouin Arabic is often seen as more prestigious than other dialects (Behnstedt, 2011).

In every level of education, Arabic is the sole language of instruction (Behnstedt, 2011). At the secondary level, students can choose to learn English or French as a second language (Behnstedt, 2011). French is most often chosen by the middle and upper class Arab Christians who live in Aleppo or Damascus; in these communities French is used as a "secondary cultural

language" (Behnstedt, 2011, Section 6). This may be a result of French rule (1922-1946) and influence (Beaton, 1988). It is common to hear code-switching between Arabic and French in Syria such as "*ʾiltillo l'emballage maw kwayyes, alors riḥət ʿand il-concurrent w laʾət ġēr situation*','I told him the packing material wasn't good, so I went to the competitor and found another situation'" (Behnstedt, 2011, Section 6). Besides English and French language classes, all instruction is provided in Modern Standard Arabic, because Arabic dialects (e.g., Syrian, Lebanese, and Egyptian, etc.) are reserved for unofficial communication only. MSA however, is used for schooling, government offices, and the media.

In the next section, I look more closely at the Arabic language and the different varieties of Arabic.

The Arabic Language

In this section, I describe the diglossic nature of the Arabic language and explain the difference between spoken Arabic and Fusha (Standard) Arabic. I also give a brief description of some religious practices that require a level of knowledge of the Arabic language. I also discuss some challenges to teaching and learning Arabic.

Varieties of Arabic.

There are approximately 300 million Native Arabic speakers today; this does not include non-Arab Muslims (Bassiouney, 2009). There are many variations of the Arabic language that give Arabic its diglossic characteristics. Diglossia refers to the distinction between a standard language and different dialects (Ferguson, 1959), in this case a different dialect is spoken in each of the Arab countries. Fusha or Standard Arabic is the official language of the 23 Arab countries including Sudan, Yemen, Syria, and Morocco (Bassiousney, 2009). It is considered to be the standardized form of Arabic, and is used across the Arab world in mass media, formal

educational and religious settings, and in all forms of literature. Fusha Arabic is divided into two varieties, the first is Classical Arabic (CA), which is the language of the Quran. As such, it is considered to be the most prestigious variety of Arabic (Almaney & Alwan, 1982). The second is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is the modern variety of CA; it is also referred to as the written variety. MSA is used in formal contexts such as mass media and formal religious or academic speeches (Feghali, 1997). Although MSA can be used for communication purposes in informal settings, it is rare and quite difficult for most people to use. Fusha is considered to be the lingua franca for Arabic speakers (Gilsenan, 1987).

Arabic dialects, or al-Lahajat al-Ammiyya, are the varieties that are spoken in everyday settings, at home, between individuals, and at the market (al-Batal, 1992). An Arabic dialect is the first variety that is taught and learned in childhood. Contrary to Arabic dialects, which are acquired through natural settings at home and in society, MSA is learned in school and not acquired from a person's natural environment (Al-Wer, 1997). It is the variety that is found in textbooks and Arabic literature. Local dialects vary between countries, cities, villages, and even within families. It would not be correct to assume that a Lebanese Arab could understand a Moroccan Arab. However, most Arabs understand Egyptian Arabic because of Egypt's widespread and popular film and music industry (Feghali, 1997).

In this thesis, I am concerned with the type of Arabic that my participants learned during their language study abroad and the motivation to learn that particular type. The five participants classified their Arabic second language classes as being centered on the Fusha variety. Fusha refers to both CA and MSA, and because these two varieties share many of the same grammatical characteristics, they are often taught concurrently in Arabic language learning classes. A major distinction between CA and MSA is that CA is taught for the sole intention of

being able to read, understand, and analyze religious texts such as the Quran and other early texts from the 7th to the 9th centuries (al-Batal, 1992). MSA entails a more secular approach to Arabic language learning, however Arabic language students who learn MSA are able to read and comprehend the Quran as well as other texts such as classical Arabic poetry.

The diglossic nature of Arabic is an important aspect of my study because my participants lived in Egypt and Syria while studying Arabic as a second language. While they studied Fusha formally in a classroom or with a private tutor, they were also exposed to the local dialects of the people they interacted with while living and studying abroad.

In the next section, I explain the relationship between Arabic and Islam.

Arabic and Islam

The Quran is the center of the Islamic faith. It is the most comprehensive piece of literature on Islamic law, beliefs, and history. Muslims believe that the Quran is the last and final revelation from God (Cragg, 1973), after the Torah, the Gospel, and the Bible. It is believed that the Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) over a period of 22 years. The Quran was revealed in Arabic and it includes many verses that attest to its revelation in Arabic. For example, Surah Yusuf (12:2) says: "Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an that you might understand" (Quran, 12:2).

Muslim children begin to memorize the Quran at a young age, some as soon as they are able to speak. Because the Quran is complex in meaning, children memorize without knowing the meaning of the words they are reciting. Muslim children are taught the Quran either at home by parents or other family members or sent to local mosques or private tutors. Because the Quran is difficult to understand even for adults, children are not taught the meaning of the verses they memorize until they are much older, usually when the parents or teachers feel the children

can comprehend the meaning. Through "religious socialisation" (Jaspal & Coyle, 2009, p. 20) children are taught to believe that memorizing "these words are good and directed to God" (Rosowsky, 2007, p. 314), and they also use the Quran that they memorize during their five daily prayers. The five daily prayers become obligatory for every Muslim starting at the age of seven. Islam certainly has its "linguistic demands" (Jaspal & Coyle, 2009, p. 18). Not only is the Quran central to the lives of Muslims, but prayer, the Friday prayer sermon, and remembrance of God known as *dhikr*, are just a few religious obligations in which the Arabic language is used. Muslims pray in Arabic, and it is required in the prayer to recite from memory Surah Al-Fatiha, which is the first chapter in the Quran, followed by any other verses or chapter from the Quran (Rosowsky, 2006). For students who wish to study the Quran, read it, or analyze and participate in debates concerning its content, extensive study of the Arabic language is essential.

Challenges to Teaching and Learning Arabic

The diglossic nature of Arabic has tremendous implications for the teaching and learning of the language. Teachers of Arabic as a foreign language are continuously faced with the question of which form of Arabic to teach and how to teach it. A study done by the National Middle East Language Resource Center of over 650 students learning Arabic at 37 institutions in the United States found that the majority of students of Arabic wish to learn an Arabic dialect (Palmer, 2007). Students felt that learning a spoken dialect would allow them to understand and be understood by most other Arabs during everyday interaction. Choosing which Arabic dialect to learn could pose a problem for Arabic language learners, simply because there are so many. When deciding which dialect to teach, Ferguson (1959) recommended that teachers choose a dialect that is spoken by many Arabs and is generally understood by the majority of the Arabic world, such as the Egyptian dialect. Another factor in choosing which dialect to teach would be

to choose a dialect that would make it an easy learning shift to MSA (al-Batal, 1995). This interest in learning Arabic dialects poses a challenge for Arabic language institutes who, up until recently, have focused Arabic teaching on MSA and Classical Arabic, as that is the language of the Quran and it is the standardized form used in all Arab countries (Anderson, 2010). For Arabic language institutions, this has meant finding new teachers, adopting new teaching methods, and creating new textbooks (Anderson, 2010) to fulfill the needs of their students. However, Belnap's (1987) study found that most students who learn Arabic want to be proficient in the language as a whole; this means they want to learn how to interact with Arabs, as well as to be able to read and write in Arabic. Learning a spoken variety exclusively would not capture the entirety of the Arabic language. To achieve native-like ability in Arabic, competency in MSA as well as one spoken variety would be necessary (Palmer, 2007).

In the majority of Arabic learning institutions, the formal variety, MSA, is taught. According to al-Batal (1995) this "creates a fake model of oral proficiency by presenting the students with an artificial variety that is not used by the native speakers since no one uses [formal Arabic] for daily-life situations" (p. 122). On the other hand, only teaching the standard variety does a disservice to Arabic language learners who want to be able to interact with other Arabic speakers in a language they actually use in daily communication. However, learning MSA would allow Arabic language learners to gain access to mass media and entertainment (theatre, movies, poetry), as well as give them the ability to study subjects such as literature and humanities in the Arabic language. It would also help learners understand formal speeches by government officials and religious leaders. Also, learning to speak in MSA could facilitate the learning of any dialect of Arabic (al-Batal, 1995). As Younes (1995) wrote, "if the goal of an Arabic-as-a-foreign-language program is to prepare students to function successfully in Arabic,

then they should be introduced to both a Spoken Arabic dialect and [formal Arabic] from the beginning of an Arabic course" (p. 233). Such an approach is, regrettably, not standard practice in the field (Palmer 2007). One of the most common problems learners of foreign languages studying abroad may encounter is the stress that they feel if they are unable to communicate with the host population (Bosher, 1997; Krywulak, 1997). In terms of teaching and learning Arabic as a foreign language, Ryding (1995) explained that "while the educational establishment has for decades enforced the concept of MSA first; this is completely the reverse of the native speaker's experience with Arabic as a mother tongue" (p. 226). Since MSA is only taught formally in school to Arabic native speakers, it is taught much like a foreign language would be taught.

The challenges associated with choosing which variety of Arabic to learn and teach is relevant when considering the motivations behind language learning. Other issues involve how to best teach each variety, as well as problems with inadequate textbooks and teaching materials, which originate in the Middle East and do not appeal to Arabic language learners living in the West.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the condition of the Muslim population living in the West, the challenges they face, and their struggle to adopt behaviors from the host culture while trying to keep their own identity and traditions. Muslims have migrated to all parts of the world for a variety of reasons, some by choice and others by force. As a result Muslims in Diaspora have had to reconcile the fact that they may never be able to return to their homeland, and some feel uprooted and have lost a sense of belonging to their country of origin. Some immigrants strive to make their place of residence their new home for themselves and their families.

I also described the two countries that the participants in this study travelled to learn Arabic. Egypt and Syria are the two most common countries to travel to for people interested in learning Arabic as a second language. At the time, the participants went to Egypt and Syria because they considered these countries to be the most affordable to live in and the most safe compared to other countries in the Middle East and Gulf. It is important to note that the participants studied Egypt and Syria before the Arab Spring began. The environment in Egypt and Syria has drastically changed since the revolutions began and they are currently not affordable or safe to be in.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter, I present my theoretical framework and literature review. I draw on post-traditional theories of culture and identity to understand the meanings of the participants' social investment in and experiences of studying Arabic as a second language. I explore language, identity and culture by drawing on the theories of self and identity of Stuart Hall (2003), Dorothy Holland (1998), and Homi Bhabha (1994). S. Hall (2003) describes identity as a process. He argues that identity is "the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from,' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (p. 4). Similar to S. Hall (2003), Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) also view identity as a process. They believe that identity is a product of action, of partaking in the social world, and that "identities are lived in and through activity" (1998, p. 5). Identities also develop over a course of a person's life and serve as a motivating factor in social activities (Holland et al, 1998): "[identities] are important bases from which people create new activities, new worlds, and new ways of being" (p. 5).

Bhabha (1994) uses the terms hybridity and difference to describe identity. He argues that post-colonial individuals negotiate and restructure their identities within a third space, or 'inbetweenness'. He states that "in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity" (1994, p. 2). I also explore Giddens' (1991) notion of self-reflexive identity, which he doesn't define clearly but aims to describe as the role it has on self-identity:

> The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very

> practices, thus constitutively altering their character . . . only in the era of modernity is the revision of convention radicalised to apply (in principle) to all aspects of human life. (pp. 38–9)

I use these conceptual frameworks to explore the culture and identity of the Muslim Diaspora community within a Western context. Studies concerning Muslims growing up in Canada are limited and do not take into consideration factors such as religion, tradition, race, class, ethnicity, education, their multicultural identities. Therefore, I also present a critical review of relevant literature of Muslims living in the West and Muslim identity construction to understand how scholars represent Muslims and Muslim identities.

Culture and Agency in the Muslim Diaspora

Muslims living in the West are in a position where the majority culture often conflict with their religious beliefs and practices. Muslims who are brought up in the West face differences with respect to dating, alcohol, mixing with the opposite sex, and ways of dressing. From a young age, Muslim children are taught to refrain from activities or environments that are forbidden in their religion, such as going to parties where alcohol is being served. Parents who want to teach their children Islamic values often teach them through modelling the behavior themselves such as not bringing alcohol into the house, or attending gatherings where there is alcohol. Some parents also encourage their children to make friends who share these Islamic values, making it easier for young people to socialize while maintaining their Islamic values. Young people may prefer to socialize with other practicing Muslims who share their values; no matter what their ethnic background is; they may feel that they do not have much in common with their peers who share their ethnic or national heritage (Kopp, 2002). Thus, Muslim children and youth are negotiating their identities as Muslims and as Westerners; they are trying to find a

way to fit in with their peers and social networks while maintaining their religious beliefs and practices. Whether they are defining who they are and who they would like to become, consciously or unconsciously, Muslims in the West are continuously negotiating their identities and positioning within society. In "Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds", Holland et al. (1998) argued that:

> As an often unintended but sometimes purposive consequence, there is a continual process of heuristic development: individuals and groups are always (re)forming themselves as persons and collectives through cultural materials created in the immediate and the more distant past. (p. 18)

I have been influenced by Holland et al.'s views on identity as an evolving process. They describe identities as "self-understandings" (p. 8), or the way we describe ourselves to others. Holland et al. (1998) wrote that "people tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are" (p. 3). Thus, they believe that identity unites both the intimate worlds that people experience and the collective spaces in which they live. Collective spaces include cultural norms and relationships with others.

Holland et al. (1987) described a theory of the organization of cultural knowledge that refers to knowing how one must act in the world; how we come to know how to act in the world directly influences how we present ourselves to others. Culture then is 'shared knowledge', it is what "one must know in order to act as they do, make the things they make, and interpret their experience in the distinctive way they do" (p. 4). Holland et al. (1998) later argued that cultural knowledge is a socio-cognitive practice that guides individuals to make goals and reach them. If identity is formed through activity, then identity can also be described as a product of social

practice that combines both an individual's personal world as well as a "collective space" (Holland et al., 1998, p. 5).

The idea that our intimate world helps to define our identity is intriguing to me. Spirituality has a large place in the Islamic faith, and in order to maintain or build our spiritual nature, we are encouraged to pray, especially in the middle of the night. Prayer can be considered a form of meditation and is an intimate conversation between an individual and their Creator. I believe that in these prayers and meditations Muslims can find their 'intimate world', and in this intimate world a person can learn more about themselves, their weaknesses, and strengths, and discover what kind of a person they would like to be in the world. Once individuals figure out who they want to be in the world, they can begin to act on their desire to be their ideal self and find new ways to 'be' in the world.

Collective spaces such as mosques and Islamic community centers are also fundamental to the Muslim faith as there are many religious rituals that are encouraged to be done in congregation. For example, the five daily obligatory prayers are rewarded more by God if done in congregation with others. Also breaking the fast at the end of the day during the holy month of Ramadan has greater blessings and rewards when done with others. Community and togetherness is emphasized within the Islamic culture and through social gatherings, individuals learn from one another about how to act and how to build and maintain healthy relationships such as in marriage or with their children. In my experiences, during social gatherings with friends and family, we discuss topics that are relevant to our daily lives and struggles, and we share information and tips on ways we can maintain our religious practices while managing busy lives with family, work, and school. For example, we share resources like books, curricula, and online websites that help us to teach our children their religion. We also share information about

religious classes, and children's events or celebrations happening around Montreal, so that our children can participate and engage in religious activities with other Muslim children.

As a first generation Canadian, I am constantly seeking resources and information that help guide me on my path of not only practicing my own faith but helping my children practice theirs. Giddens (1990) stated that, "the self today is for everyone a reflexive project - a more or less continuous interrogation of past, present and future" (p. 30). In this context, tradition loses its hold on individuals, and people are forced to construct their own identities according to their specific circumstances. Thus, I cannot raise my children the way my parents raised me because my children are growing up in a different world than I did. Children are dealing with issues that their parents did not have to deal with when they were young, especially with the advent of technology. Children are exposed to information and resources from around the globe via the World Wide Web. They also have access to different people who have different beliefs, ideas, and values via social networking sites and chat rooms. Although access to the internet has some advantages like connecting fragmented families and communities, parents no longer have the control they once did over their children's friends, acquaintances, and environments. The lack of control parents feel and the vast freedoms children now have to connect with others online, may cause stress and strife for many families. We no longer live in bound, fixed culturally attributed identity positions, but rather the modern world has forced individuals to find their own way of constructing their identities: "we have no choice but to choose how to be and how to act" (Giddens, 1994, p. 75).

I believe that ‘cultural materials’ (Holland et al., 1998), which I would describe as anything that reminds me of my culture and religion, such as prayer rugs, the veil, halal food, and even conversations with friends and discussions about the challenges of family life and

religious child-rearing, contribute to my understanding of what it means to live in Canada and be Muslim. Gatherings such as these help me understand who I am as a mother, wife, daughter, sister, student, employee, and an Arab while maintaining my Muslim identity. Association with the Syrian and Lebanese communities in Montreal has also given me greater cultural knowledge of what it means to be Syrian, Lebanese, and more generally, Arab. I have learned specific speech practices, such as how to greet others in Arabic, how to congratulate them on special occasions, and customs of receiving guests in my home. For example, when Egyptians greet they sometimes say “nawart Masr” or “nawart Montreal”, which means “you lit up Egypt” or “you lit up Montreal.” The reply is “nourkum”, which means “your light.” This is a cultural and customary way to make guests feel welcome and special. My different identities constitute who I am and directly determine my actions, beliefs, values, and mannerism according to the contextual situation in which I find myself. Many Muslims who were born and raised in Canada are creating their identities through social activities and social interactions rather than through parental, ethnic, or cultural impositions. Holland et al.'s (1998) work on cultural knowledge and materials is relevant because through social practice and activity the participants in this inquiry were able to learn from their interactions with Arabs and Muslims in Egypt and Syria. By travelling overseas to learn Arabic as a second language, they were able to gain access to Arab and Muslim customs and behaviors.

Culture and Identity

I have also drawn on the work of Daniel Yon (2000), who describes identity as a process that is ongoing and elusive. In his book "Elusive Culture", Yon (2000) examined the identity formation of youth within a school setting. He conducted his research in Maple Heights High School in Toronto, Canada. Yon discussed identity in relation to recognizing the sameness or

difference between ourselves and others around us by examining how identity is shaped by "context and history" and the role that global citizenship plays in identity formation. He stated that:

> the passion for identity takes shape as assumptions about sameness or difference between selves and communities are brought into question and people begin to reflect upon who they are or worry about what they are becoming. (p. 2)

It is in this recognition of sameness and difference that people define who they are and how they want others to see them. Due to the wide gap between Muslim culture and Western culture, "sameness and difference between selves and communities" are easy to locate, yet difficult to manoeuvre through. Yon (2000) believes that:

> Identity is not already "there"; rather, it is a production, emergent, in process. It is situational – it shifts from context to context. The identity passionately espoused in one public scenario is more ambiguously and ambivalently "lived" in private. Its contradictions are negotiated, not "resolved". (p. xi)

Maguire et al. (2005) referred to this shifting of identities in different contexts as "the chameleon character of identity construction" (p. 163). Muslim identities are shaped through and within difference. S. Hall (1996c) stated that "identities are constructed through, not outside difference" (p. 4). He conceptualized difference as a recognition of the Other, explaining that it is

> [a] recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the 'positive' meaning of any term - and thus its identity can be constructed. (1995, p. 4)

S. Hall (1996b) disagreed with the notion of grouping individuals together as "one people" and argued instead that people are marked by difference, and identity is formed through difference rather than through similarities. For example, he argued that we can no longer use the terms ethnicity or race to describe people. Ethnicity, which includes cultural features such as language, religion, and custom does not encompass the diversity found within these features. There are difference dialects, denominations of religion, and customs differ according to country, region, village, and even family. Race is also not an adequate marker of a unified people, Stuart Hall argued. Race encompasses physical features such as hair type, skin color, and other bodily features. However, through the mixing of different nations and peoples, this has also lost its marker for identity. Therefore, by recognizing the diversity of people, which can be found within the same culture, nation, or community of people who share a history or a past, individuals can construct their identities by recognizing these differences.

Through difference we define ourselves and situate ourselves in relation to others around us. Young Muslims in Canada are sometimes living in and between two distinct cultures, East and West. I experienced living within two cultures as I grew up in Canada. At home I acted the way my parents and family wished for me to be; whether that be in my religious practices or in holding traditional social and gender roles. At school or work, I assumed a different identity, one that was more Western. For instance, Muslim girls who are expected to act quiet, modest, and shy at home or around family members may act more loudly, flirtatious, and confident when out with non-Muslim friends. Being caught between these two worlds and cultures, young Muslims may struggle to find their social identity and a sense of belonging. The experiences that the five Muslims in my inquiry perceived they had during their childhoods and youths in Canada contributed to their desires and investments in learning Arabic as a second language. They made

a conscious decision and effort to learn a language that would help them to understand their religion and as a result become the Muslim they idealized themselves to be. By envisioning who they wanted to become, they set their goal on learning Arabic and went through the process of negotiating their identities as Muslim and Canadian.

Identity theorists Yon (2000), Giddens (1991), and S. Hall (2003) agree that identity is not a stable, situated concept, but rather that a person's identity emerges through lived experiences and the activities individuals choose to participate in life. The participants have experienced language learning in a study abroad context where Arabic is the official language of the country. They travelled to Egypt or Syria to learn Arabic as a second language. It is inevitable that this experience of travelling to another country and developing fluency in Arabic for religious and communicative purposes has impacted and changed their identity and opened them up to new worlds. As S. Hall (1996b) argued, it is through communication with the outside world that the self is formed.

Sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall discussed concepts of cultural identity, race, and ethnicity. He defined cultural identity as "those aspects of our identities which arise from our belonging to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, and above all, national cultures" (S. Hall, 1996b, p. 596). He viewed the concept of identity as a “strategic and positional one” (1996b, p. 3). He later argued that:

> Identity is a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. . .we all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always ‘in context,’ positioned. (2003, p. 234)

Stuart Hall (2003) theorized cultural identity in two ways. First identity is seen as a "collective, shared history among individuals affiliated by race or ethnicity that is considered to be fixed or stable" (p. 233). In this way, our cultural identities include shared codes of meaning, a shared history and similar historical experiences. This shared history creates a sense of oneness. The notion of cultural identity has played a huge part in the post colonial world where people are trying to remain whole and connected to their people and culture despite the effects and outcomes of colonization. Second, and this is the view S. Hall (2003) aligns himself with, cultural identity is viewed as being marked by similarities and differences and therefore is unstable. He stated that we cannot speak of "one experience, one identity" for long (p. 236).

The Muslim colonial experience plays a role in this view of cultural identity. Identity research helps us to understand the role that colonization played and still plays in the discontinuities and fragmentation of communities. Identity research also helps us to understand the loss of identity that many races and cultures underwent as a result of colonization. Colonization includes the exploitation and acquisition of land; however, it also involves the imposition of language, culture, behavior, dress and social and political practices. As Europe gained a stronger hold on the Middle East in the nineteenth century, Western imagery of the Muslim woman began to enter travel books and historical and anthropological depictions (Mabro, 1991). More specifically, the Muslim veil was highlighted as a form of oppression and submissiveness. Leila Ahmed (1992) wrote:

> Veiling—to Western eyes, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies—became the symbol now of both the oppression of women (or, in the language of the day, Islam's degradation of women) and the

backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies. (p. 152)

(Retrieved from www.aquila-style.com)

Photo 8: Muslim women wearing the veil

The purpose of circulating such images and representations of the Muslim veil was to justify the colonization of the inferior and backwards Arab Muslims by the superior and modern West (Hoodfar, 1992). Since 9/11, the veil has become a major issue once again. The United States used the veil to defend their war in Afghanistan, using the liberation of women as justification for the attack of another country. Images of women wearing the burqa, a long robe that flows from head to toe and covers the face and eyes, became the focus of the war on Afghanistan. The image of the veiled woman helped gain support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Representations of Muslim women as needing to be rescued sometimes make it difficult for Muslim women to wear the veil and assert their Muslim identity in the West. It reflects and perpetuates the idea of the need for the dominant majority to “free Third world women, in particular Muslim women, from their communities” (Khan, 2002, p. xxiii). Muslims come from all parts of the world; some are also converts. However, "the Muslim community" is portrayed in the media as a homogenous religious immigrant community with few class and race differences (Haddad & Smith, 1993). Western society assumes that Muslim women are forced to wear the veil, commit to polygamous marriages, and be subservient to their husbands (Bilge & Aswad, 1996).

Identities are formed as a result of the different ways we are positioned or represented by others, as well as how we position or represent ourselves (S. Hall, 2003). Colonization not only created an 'us versus them' notion of being, or in other words created a sense of Otherness, but colonization also, sadly, succeeded in making people perceive and experience themselves as the Other (S. Hall, 2003). Stuart Hall looked at 'difference' and believes that identities should be formed through and with difference, not despite it, or in other words through hybridity. Similar to Hall's beliefs, post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha (1994) argued that it is through the "the overlap and displacement of domains of difference" that "collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (p. 2). Through learning a second language, people construct new identities as they mediate within two or more cultures and languages; it is through this process of mediation and negotiation that individuals find themselves in a third space or what Bhabha calls inbetweenness.

Maguire et al. (2005) described hybrid identities as being a part of various language communities or cultural groups. They stated that "identity construction is a process of negotiation between sites of agency and locally and globally perceived, conceived, or lived spaces of possibilities for belonging and establishing cultural dialogues" (p. 1426). Hybrid identities are formed as a result of negotiating who we are in the world and determining who we are becoming as a result of our past and present affiliations and connections to a language or cultural environment. People who live in Diasporic communities may create hybrid identities as they participate and affiliate themselves with different linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and religious groups in their new place of settlement.

The term Diaspora has been conceptualized and defined in different ways. Clifford (1994) defined the features of a Diaspora as a "history of dispersal, myths/memories of the

homeland, and alienation in the host country, desire for eventual return, ongoing support of the homeland, and a collective identity importantly defined by this relationship" (p. 305). Diaspora is constituted by feelings of not belonging and displacement (Moghissi, Rahnema, & Goodman, 2009). What constitutes a Diaspora community is the shared feeling of displacement. Stuart Hall (2003) conceptualized Diaspora in the following way: "Diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all cost return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea" (p. 235). Hall suggested that living in Diaspora is not defined by "essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity" (p. 235). The Diasporic identity is formed as individuals are "constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (p. 235). Muslim populations are rapidly increasing in the West (Moghissi et al., 2009) and Muslim Diasporas include ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and class variations. The host country also plays a role in the Muslim Diaspora experience, for example with regards to how tolerant it is to the Muslim minority, as well as the social, economic, and political environment in the host country. Muslims in Diaspora may have triple identities (Rahnema, 2006). First, they have their religious or sectarian identities; second, their ethnic or homeland identities, such as Syrian, Nigerian, Pakistani, Iranian, Arab, Egyptian, Algerian, or Turkish; and third, they are citizens of the country they reside in and sometimes adopt cultural behaviors and characteristics found in the dominant society. Also, within these categories there are class, age, and gender differences. These multiple identities may conflict with one another, and one identity may play a more dominant role than others. For example, an individual may identify themselves as being Canadian first, and Syrian second, or Muslim first and Canadian second. Diaspora experience in

today's globalized and post-colonial world is constituted by diversity and the formation of identities that are always in production, transforming, and changing (S. Hall, 2003).

It is important to recognize the continuing influence of the British and French colonization of the Middle East in current social, environmental, political and religious climates in the Muslim world. Edward Said (1979) described the severe exploitation of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East as a result of their colonization by the Western world. He included the slave trade and the study and representation of Eastern cultures and practices as two colonial practices carried out by the West. Due to colonization, globalization, and migration it is difficult to describe, define, or situate exactly how a Muslim can be defined or identified. Rather, as S. Hall (1990) argued, the identities of a people are blended heterogeneous and mixed. Due to globalization, migration, and mass communication, people are being exposed to various beliefs, ideologies, and ways of being. However, Muslims have extra challenges when dealing with images and portrayals of them and their religious beliefs in mass media, such as the news channels, such as CNN and Hollywood movies such as The Kingdom (2007). Their Muslim identities are being defined for them over and over again through these images and representations being played out on TV and the internet. Jack G. Shaheen, author of "Reel Bad Arabs" (2001) and "Guilty: Hollywood's Verdict on Arabs after 9/11" (2008), condemned the entertainment industry for its vilifying and damaging portrayals that show Arabs and Muslims as violent, primitive, and threatening to other religions. Since 9/11 Islam has become a target for discrimination and is being depicted as a threat to Western culture, values, and ideas (Shaheen, 2001). Due to these portrayals of Muslims, a culture of fear has been created towards Muslims and the religion of Islam. These images and portrayals have led many Muslims, including

myself to educate themselves more about Islam and to learn what it means to really be a Muslim in today's world and in the West.

Although people may seek out their pasts and roots in order to search for their identities, identities are no longer viewed as selves which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common (S. Hall, 1990). A shared ancestry or past cannot determine a fixed identity or "'oneness' or cultural belongingness" (S. Hall, 1996c, p. 4). Instead Hall argued that identities are never fixed in post modern times, but fragmented and fractured across various positions, practices, and contexts (S. Hall, 1996c). Modern societies are described by S. Hall (1996b) as "societies of constant, rapid, and permanent change" (p. 599). Hall attributed these changing and unstable identities to globalization and increased migration; these factors have essentially disrupted the "'settled' character of many populations and cultures" (1996c, p. 4).

Central to my research concerning Muslim-Canadians living in the West is the importance that S. Hall (1996c) has placed on using the past and ancestry as "resources" (p.4) that individuals can draw on in order to participate in the "process of becoming rather than being" (p. 4). Identity is not about "who we are" or "where we came from" but rather about "what we might become, how we have been represented" (p. 4). The way we are represented helps determine how we choose to represent ourselves to others. S. Hall (1996c) pointed to the disturbing realization that it is through recognizing and identifying the Other, which is recognizing what we are not, or what we lack in relation to Others than we can than construct identities according to those differences. He argued that:

> [identities] emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical,

> naturally-constituted unity - an 'identity' in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation). (p. 4)

Similarly, Bhabha (1994) stated that:

> The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. (p. 2)

Drawing on Bhabha and Stuart Hall, identities are negotiated and formed through power and exclusion.

In post-modern times, traditional ways of viewing and constructing identities, such as those taught through religious teachings that are passed from generation to generation, are no longer accepted by the younger generations and by modern society. For example, Muslims who immigrate to a Western country must renegotiate their identities in order to reconcile the differences between their traditional or home country religious and cultural practices and the practices found in the Western host country. Second or third generation Muslims can be viewed as post-modern individuals as they cannot rely completely on their Muslim culture or Islamic religion to determine their lives and goals in life. They are displaced from the central Islamic countries and must negotiate Western practices such as dating or living together before marriage. S. Hall (1990) very eloquently described this phenomenon:

> If we feel that we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story about ourselves. The fully unified, completed, secure, and coherent identity is a fantasy. Instead as the systems of meaning and cultural representation multiply, we are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities, any one of which we could identify with—at least

temporarily. (p. 237)

Globalization and modernity have both contributed to the understanding that identity construction is a never ending process. Identity shifts, changes, and is transformed through time and changing living conditions. Identity "does not signal that stable core of the self" (S. Hall, 1996a, p. 3). Muslims have had to deal with political, economic, social, and environment changes as they immigrated to countries that are sometimes very different from home.

Self-Reflexivity and Identity

Giddens (1991) discussed modernism and its relation to the self-reflexive self. He described modernity as “the industrialized world”, which includes concepts of globalization, capitalism, and social structures such as the “nation-state” (p. 15). He explained that modernity has essentially altered the daily life of individuals and societies, and that it impacts experience and the self. He also stated that one unique feature of modernity is the need for people to build a resolution between the influences of globalization and the personal needs and individual qualities of the self. Modernity includes activities such as increased global mobility and the use of media and electronics to disperse ideas and experiences. As a result of modernization, individuals are forced to navigate through various life choices and ways of living in the world. Giddens affirmed the need to be self-reflexive. He referred to this as “the reflexive project of the self”, which he described as a way to maintain “coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives” (p. 5). Giddens (1991) described a person's identity as constituted and constructed by telling a story about oneself:

> A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor - important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-

> day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self. (p. 54)

In cultures that are in continuous change and transformation, the self must be reflexive in order to negotiate its identity within these changing landscapes: "in settings of modernity . . .the altered self has to be explored and constructed as part of a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change" (Giddens, 1991, p. 33). Individuals must cultivate a new sense of self.

Modernization has resulted in fragmented communities, breaking down the concept of small communities, and the traditional practices within these communities (Giddens, 1991). As a result, people may feel alone or lost in the world, lacking a sense of security that was once found in their respective communities (Giddens, 1991). This is where the process of self-reflexivity and the construction of new self-identities begin. As Young (1996) wrote, "heterogeneity, cultural interchange and diversity have now become the self-conscious identity of modern society" (p. 4).

Giddens (1991) argued that institutions within a modern society are so different from traditional cultural practices found in religion that they are sometimes at odds with one another:

> Modern institutions differ from all preceding forms of social order, in respect of their dynamism, the degree to which they undercut traditional habits and customs, and their global impact. (p. 1)

The Muslim religion is a traditional Eastern religion that finds itself destabilized by modern institutions because religion is not as flexible as other institutions found within a modern society. In the Muslim Diaspora, a large proportion of Muslims are studying and trying to understand their faith in a way the older generation did not. They are no longer taking for

granted that they are Muslim by birth, and absorbing what their parents are teaching them. They are aware of the various Islamic principles and opinions concerning various Islamic laws and teachings, and are in search of this knowledge for themselves. Islam is not just a cultural practice that everyone acts upon, but rather a conscious decision and way of life that must be explored and understood on an individual and intimate level. Identity is a venture that each individual undertakes.

In a modern context, traditional elements of Islamic beliefs and the rituals associated with the five pillars of Islam are relatively unaffected and have remained unchanged. For example, fasting during the month of Ramadan rather than choosing another more convenient month to fast have remained unacceptable among all Muslims. Doing the five daily prayers in Arabic rather than another language has also remained unchanged. This is not to say that Islam has not been affected by modernity, but rather that Muslims must reflect and negotiate their identities as Muslims on a more personal level. For example, the veil is a powerful symbol of Muslim identity that carries different meanings for Muslims and non-Muslims. In Canada, it clearly identifies someone as being Muslim. A Muslim woman in Canada who decides to wear the veil sometimes faces prejudice and stereotyping as a result. The decision-making process that Muslim women go through in deciding whether to wear the veil or not is a personal one, which takes into consideration the community setting as well as the political and social climate they live in. In some parts of the world, such as France and currently Quebec, Muslim women are fighting for their right to wear the veil, while in other parts, such as Afghanistan, they are fighting for their right to not be forced to wear the burqa. The tension between Islamic rules and Western culture makes the process of identity development multifaceted and complex for Muslim-Canadians. The move from a Muslim society to a non-Muslim society has led Muslims

to self-identify as Muslims in different ways. For example, in modern societies in the West, there is a separation between religious life and secular life and this has led Muslims to assert their religious identities in more private ways, such as studying the Quran to increase their knowledge, or practicing their rituals of praying and fasting without allowing them to interfere with their studies or work schedules. The identity construction of Muslims living in Canada requires each individual to reflect on their own beliefs and value systems and decide whether their previous beliefs and values are in agreement or at odds with those of the majority society. Self-reflection can aid in helping a person decide how to reconcile those differences yet maintain their Muslim identity. Overall, Holland et al. (1998), Yon (2000), and Stuart Hall (2003) all conceptualized identity as constructed throughout an individual's life as a process and a result of interacting with others. They also strongly believed in the relationships between action and identity. Holland et al. (1998) described identity as constructed through social activity, while Hall (2003) described it as always in "production. . . .never complete, always in process" (p. 234). Giddens (1991) shared the view that in modern times the self must be "explored and constructed" (p. 33).

Holland et al. and Hall both discussed difference and how identity is formed by becoming aware of the differences between ourselves and others. Hall (2003) wrote about how representation influences the ways we view ourselves and the ways we (re)present ourselves to the world. The connection between representation and self-representation is interesting because the negative ways that Muslims have been represented in media have made many Muslims, including myself, more aware of how we represent ourselves to those around us, whether it is the way we dress or our behavior. For instance, some Muslim women do not wear the veil so that they are not identified as Muslims and viewed or treated in a negative way. Other Muslim

women wear the veil so that they can be identified by their religion and through their behavior they try to personify the positive aspects of Islam. By wearing the veil, they want to help give Islam a positive image by showing what it means to be a good Muslim, such as being polite, taking care of their families, being hard working and in general being good, charitable, and kind. They want to give a different image of Islam and Muslims than what is shown in the news and in movies.

Giddens' theory emphasizes the processes of being reflective and reflexive, processes that provide a greater understanding of identity and identity construction. Individuals who reflect on their experiences and life events may be better able to know themselves and who they would like to become. Yon (2000) also saw being reflective as central to identity. In order to recognize and be aware of differences and similarities between ourselves and others, we must be reflective and reflexive of ourselves as well as on those around us. As we reflect on our life experiences and values, we may benefit by reflecting on the experiences of others and the values that they hold.

Muslims, Identity, and Diaspora

The Muslim Diaspora is a group of Muslims who originate from all parts of the world, including East Asia, North Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and South America. Children of immigrant parents must learn to navigate cultural rules and practices that their parents may not have had to face. The literature concerning the identities of Muslims in the Diaspora show that identities are fluid, multiple, positioned, contested and changing.

Conceptions of identity relevant to the Diaspora include border crossing and hybrid identities. Border crossing refers to immigrants who have one foot on each side of the border. Anzaldúa's (1987) "Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza" describes the identity of

Mexican and U.S. citizens. Anzaldúa wrote that, "Being Mexican is a state of soul - not one of mind, not one of citizenship" (p. 84). Muslims who come from other parts of the world have an added challenge of keeping one foot on each side of the border, neither being completely here nor there. As a result, these border crossers may form hybrid identities, a blend of two or more identities. The first identity is the one they were born with and the second is the identity of the host society they now reside in. This hybridity includes what Bhabha referred to as a "third space". This is the 'inbetweenness' in which people who live in multicultural societies create for themselves.

Rampton (2005) studied how youth of mixed races in Britain use language to create hybrid identities. The participants included youth from the Caribbean, India and Pakistan, as well as England. Through observations and interviews, Rampton found that young British people of mixed races would use different languages during their interactions with different individuals. For instance a young person of African-Caribbean background would use Punjabi during their interactions with other Punjabi's to assert a particular identity in a particular social relationship. Rampton referred to language used in this way as "crossings".

Warner (1998) argued that "religious identities often (but not always) mean more to [individuals] away from home, in their Diaspora, than they did before, and those identities undergo more or less modification as the years pass" (p. 3). Warner also suggested that the reason religion and religious identity are so important for people living in Diaspora is because "the religious institutions they build, adapt, remodel and adopt become worlds unto themselves, 'congregations', where new relations among the members of the community - among men and women, parents and children, recent arrivals and those settled - are forged" (p. 3). Muslims are challenged with creating and adopting a religious space and a secular space living in North

America. At the same time, more distinctions are also being made between what is considered religious (Islamic) and cultural behavior and rules. For people who grew up in a Muslim majority culture that is generally heterogeneous, religion, and culture were practically indistinguishable. Certain rules that apply to the freedoms awarded to women, such as going out with friends, staying out late, participating in certain social activities like sports or entertainment where men could be watching them, can all be cultural customs and prohibitions but be attributed to the religion of Islam.

Kim Knott and Sadja Kokher (1993) interviewed South Asian Muslim women and found that they established a distinction for themselves between what is considered religious practice and what is cultural practice. The result of this "self conscious exploration of the religion which was not relevant to the first generation" (p. 596) is that Muslim women are rejecting the cultural or ethnic practices of their parents and instead purifying their religious practice of all culture. For instance, women may reject a particular way of dressing and adopt a manner of dressing that asserts their Muslim identity only.

In the next section, I discuss how identity relates to second language learning, in particular with respect to issues involving Muslim identity and learning Arabic as a second language.

Identity and the Muslim Diaspora

In this section, I discuss literature that has looked at identity in the Muslim Diaspora. In a study conducted with Somali Muslims in Toronto and London, Berns McGown (1999) found that religion was often used as an ‘anchor’ that provided communities who are displaced a sense of rootedness and belonging:

> [Islam] provided an oasis of tranquility amid the dislocation of refugee straits and the turmoil of adjusting to a new culture, trying to learn a new language, and attempting to find jobs. What was valuable about it was the very ritual of stepping outside the daily struggle, five times over the course of the day, to concentrate on the prayers that never alter, in rhythmic language that linked them to a community of believers that was theirs no matter where in the world they were. (p. 98)

Jasmin Zine (2001) conducted a case study with ten Muslim Canadian students and parents. She looked at how young Muslims maintain and negotiate their religious identities while attending public school in Canada. The ethnographic study shed light on how young Muslims in Canada deal with peer pressure, racism, and Islamophobia. The narratives describe intersections between ethnicity, religion, and being a minority in the West. Karima, a 22-year-old student of Pakistani heritage described the difficulty she experienced in school. She talked about challenges with expectations of conformity from peers and teachers and her own need to resist conformity in order to maintain her Muslim identity:

> There's lots of challenges because I think it's natural to want to be accepted when you're growing up when you're young and you don't really have an identity. Because first of all you're Indian and then you're living in a white society and you're also trying to be accepted, but at the same time you want to be practicing Islam. It's a big struggle until you get a very strong identity as a Muslim and it takes a lot of years to build up. Trying to fit in is a hard thing to get over, but once you get over it you're very strong. (Karima, 22 years old, taken from Zine, 2001, p. 404)

Karima described her religious identity construction as a point of struggle in her life and as something that took years to build.

Berns McGown (1999) stated that negotiating issues of conformity and resistance are crucial features of maintaining religious and ethnic boundaries, especially for minorities living in a dominant culture such as the Canada:

> For some, the process of being a good Muslim in the West involves building walls around their community and finding relative isolation from mainstream society. For most, however, the process involves a gradual accommodation of traditional customs to those of the society, without losing what they consider to be essential to themselves as Muslims. (p. 233)

Conformity to and resistance of Western values and behaviors are a part of the negotiation process for many Muslims living in Canada. Through a strong affiliation with other Muslims, people may find it easier to resist the majority culture and remain committed to their heritage culture and religious beliefs. When young Muslims choose to conform to Western values and behaviors, problems begin to occur within the family unit as the values that young Muslims adopt may not be shared by their parents or other extended relatives. Parents struggle to have their children continue to be practicing Muslims and keep the values they themselves had growing up, such as no dating, no drinking, no staying up at night, as well as doing their five daily prayers, reading the Quran regularly, associating with good Muslim friends, and being respectful to their parents. The issue of conformity is probably one of the biggest problems Muslims face in Canada.

In a study entitled “Bangladeshi Muslims in Montreal: A Case of Divided Loyalty”, Roksana Nazneen (2005) showed how young Bangladeshi Muslims are identifying more with their religious identities as Muslims than with their Bangladeshi or Canadian identities. Through participant observation and interviews, Nazneen found that Bangladeshis born and raised in

Canada are identifying less with their parents' heritage and more with the Islamic faith. The events of 9/11 seems to have promoted this sense of loyalty to their religion. The participants in Nazneen's study ranged in age from 18 to 28. They argued that they never felt comfortable associating with White people, in this case non-Muslims, because they could not socialize with them due to their cultural and religious restrictions of not being able to drink, or go to nightclubs. Therefore, as a result, they found themselves drawn to other Muslims who share their values and ways of behaving. Forming stronger relationships with other Muslims helped to make them stronger Muslims and identify more with being Muslim than with being Canadian or Bangladeshi. For many Muslims, religion plays a large role in their cultural identity.

Hasib, a participant in Nazneen's study made an important point about why it is important for him to stay connected and affiliate with other Muslims:

> We have to re-invent our identity as Muslims in North America. We live in a non-Islamic country, yet we are not allowed to date or socialize with the opposite sex. How are we supposed to find our partners? I don't want my parents to find a bride for me when I am in my late twenties! . . .We meet other Muslims at the association, this is an outlet for us where we communicate about our problems. We have to renegotiate our Islamic identity in North America. Islamic Associations should promote separate Islamic educational institutions for Muslims where they would be able to socialize with other Muslims and eventually would find life-partners. This is very important for the survival of the group. . . .This will stop intermarriages. (cited in Nazeen, 2005, p. 115)

Hasib revealed feeling frustrated with being isolated. Being able to find a spouse himself is a priority for him and he doesn't want his family to find or choose a spouse for him, which is

traditionally the case in Bangladeshi society. He feels that being able to socialize with other Muslims would give him an opportunity to meet someone on his own and eventually get married.

All seven participants in Nazneen's study felt that they identified more strongly with their Muslim identity than with their Bangladeshi or Canadian identity. Experiencing discrimination and fear led these young Bangladeshi Muslim Canadians to create stronger ties to other Muslims in order to gain support and feel that they belong.

Many Muslims around the world feel a sense of communal Muslim identity that ties back to the Arabs and the Arabic language. All Muslims have one thing in common and that is that their source of reference for their religion and faith in the holy Quran and the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.). This feeling of community identity is eloquently expressed in the following utterance by Shah Wali Allah. Shah Wali Allah was an 18th century intellectual and reformer in India (Zaman, 1997). He said:

> We are strangers in this land [of India]. Our fathers and grandfathers came to live here from abroad. For us Arab descent and the Arabic language are causes of pride, because these two things bring us nearer to the Lord of the First and the Last, the noblest of Prophets and Apostles. . . .We must give thanks to God for his supreme grace by holding on as much as possible to the customs and traditions of the ancient Arabs, from whom the Prophet came and to whom he addressed himself, and by safeguarding ourselves from the penetration of Persian traditions and Indian habits. (translated in Lewis, 1994, p. 102).

Nazneen's study by no means represent all Muslims' views. Many Muslims identify strongly with their ethnic background and often confuse their ethnic or cultural practices with religious ones. For example, in some Arab countries wearing the veil is a cultural practice done

out of respect for the family or in order to not be noticed by the opposite sex. Pakistanis also have a cultural practice where the women wear the veil when the Quran is being recited. There is no rule in Islam that states that a woman must cover her hair while listening to the Quran, but Pakistanis have adopted this practice out of respect for the recitation of the Quran.

In this inquiry, I am interested in the relationship between identity and language learning with respect to religious identity. As such, I now turn to discussing relevant literature on identity and second language education.

Identity and Second Language Learning

There have been many studies conducted about identity construction and language learning. However, very few of these studies focus on Arabic as a Second Language and even fewer focus on Arabic and the Muslim identity. In this section, I examine some of the research involving identity and language learning. They are meaningful to this inquiry as they offer insight and understanding of the struggles language learners go through. Norton and Toohey (2002) explained the complex relationship between language, culture and identity:

> Language learning engages the identities of learners because language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols; it is also a complex social practice in which the value and meaning ascribed to an utterance are determined in part by the value and meaning ascribed to the person who speaks it. (p. 115)

In their book, "Arabic is the language of the Muslims – that's how it was supposed to be", Jaspal and Coyle (2010) explored language and religious identity through reflective accounts from young British-born South Asians. They interviewed twelve South Asians born in Britain to investigate how young British Muslims define and describe their religious and linguistic identities. The Muslim participants in the study talked about their views on the

sanctity of the Arabic language, the importance it has to them as Muslims, and how Arabic creates a sense of community with other Arabic speakers.

Ochs (1993) connected identity with affiliation to language communities. Ochs (1996) explained the relationship between language and culture this way:

> the two processes are intertwined from the moment a human being enters society (at birth, in the womb, or whatever point local philosophy defines as entering society). Each process facilitates the other as children and other novices come to a perspective on social life in part through signs and come to understand signs in part through social experience. (p. 407)

The work done by Norton (1997) and Norton Pierce (1995) has brought second language learning and identity research into the spotlight. Norton (1997) argued that "identity relates to desire – the desire for recognition, the desire for affiliation, and the desire for security and safety" (p. 410). The idea of desire relates directly to my study in that the participants strongly wished to be identified as Muslims and that is why they were invested to learn Arabic in a Muslim country. Not only were they interested in learning the Arabic language but they also wanted to learn some cultural and communicative norms of Muslims. Norton believes that identity "constructs and is constructed by language" (1997, p. 419). The participants were all highly invested in learning Arabic. Why they chose to learn Arabic and how well they achieved their goal are contingent on their social investments in learning the target language. Norton (2000) argued that investment represents "the socially and historically constructed relationship of learner's to the target language" (p. 10). She used the concept of social investment, rather than motivation, and discussed language learning as a matter of investment on the part of the language

learner. Investment in learning a language encompasses the individual and the effect that language learning has on a person's social identity (Norton, 1995).

A few researchers have looked at the relationship between possible selves, motivation, and identity formation. Markus and Nurius (1986) state that "possible selves represent individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming" (p. 954) and that "possible future selves represent specific, individually significant hopes, fears and fantasies" (p. 954). Possible selves are individualized and result from social experience (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Through comparison with others, an individual can compare their own "thoughts, feelings, characteristics and behaviors" (p. 954) and work towards who they would like to become or what they would like to achieve. Following up on Markus and Nurius' research, Curt S. Dunkel (2000) conducted a study in which he tried to show that possible selves are related to one's identity formation. He concluded that, "the constructive process of creating one's own identity may begin with the generation of future possibilities" (p. 527). Josselson (1980) stated that, "much of the process of identity formation takes place in selective repudiation of possible selves. Identity is exclusive; it is manifested in commitment and in the giving up of potentialities: I will do (be) this and not that" (p. 202). In other words, constructing identity involves deciding who not to become or what not to achieve, as much as it involves deciding who to be become and what to achieve. E. T. Higgins (1987) presented the self-discrepancy theory, which involves "domains of the self" and "standpoints of the self" (p. 320). Domains of the self includes three aspects: (a) the actual self, which includes the qualities that you (or someone else) believe you have; (b) the ideal self, which are qualities that you (or someone else) would like you to have; and (c) the ought to self, which are the qualities that you (or someone else) believes you should have (E. T. Higgins, 1987). There are

two standpoints of the self: your own beliefs about the qualities that you have, would like to have, or should have, and someone else's (a mother, father, significant other) beliefs about the qualities or attributes that you have, would like to have or should have (E. T. Higgins, 1987).

Drawing on the work of E. T. Higgins (1987), Dornyei (2005, 2009) examined the investment of second language learners and discussed the notion of possible selves. Possible selves are described as images of what we can or might become after learning a second language or what we are afraid of becoming. Dornyei (2009) identified three aspects of possible selves. The "ideal L2 self", which is whether "the person we would like to become speaks an L2 [a second language]" (p. 29). The "ought-to self" relates to "the attributes that one believes one ought to possess in order to meet expectations and avoid possible negative outcomes" (p. 29). Dornyei (2009) identified a third possible self that refers to the second language learning experience. This concept of self concerns the social investment by the language learners' social investments that are "related to the immediate learning environment and experience" (p. 29).

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed relevant research pertaining to identity and second language learning. I discussed the Muslim Diaspora and differences between ethnic and religious identities. In Chapter 4, I examine the methodology and methods used in this inquiry.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe my data collection process, and the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of data. I discuss and reflect on my position as a researcher. I also describe the five Muslim Canadian participants who volunteered to participate in my inquiry, and I explain the theories that frame the methods I chose for conducting this qualitative inquiry.

In this inquiry, I aimed to understand the phenomenon of Muslim-Canadians studying Arabic as a second language in a study abroad context. I chose a small sample of Muslims to interview in order to gain insights into their perceptions lived experiences. During the semi-structured interviews, participants shared stories of their experiences growing up Muslim in Canada, as well as their family dynamics, what led them to study Arabic in Egypt or Syria, and what their experiences were studying Arabic as a second language. They also shared what these experiences meant to them as Muslims, as students, as language learners, and as people interacting in the world. Each person shared narratives of how they experienced their world and interpreted their reality in essence it is a look into "lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 9).

Methodology

I framed my study as a hermeneutical phenomenological inquiry (van Manaan, 1990). I used personal narrative to capture participants' perceptions of their lived experiences situated within specific linguistic, religious, and cultural practices. I drew on postmodern theory, which rejects the notion of a master narrative, but rather sees the experiences of people as fragmented and identities as multiple (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). In postmodern theory participants are subjects rather than objects, and they are considered the ones with the expertise. Therefore, during an interview, research goals are not strictly adhered to, but rather reflexivity is

encouraged by allowing the subject to represent themselves and their experiences without strict guidelines or a question-answer format. Post-modernism assumes that:

> knowledge (including categories, beliefs, and values that filter or screen ways of seeing the world, i.e., culture) emanates from ongoing shifting and emerging relationships among people in different social positions and with different experiences of the world. (Eisenhart, 2001, p. 214)

In this view, culture cannot be defined as one coherent, fixed thing; instead culture is dynamic and continually changing (Clifford, 1986).

Postmodern theory makes us aware of the:

> chameleon character of socio-linguistic-cultural realities, encourage dialogic relationships that shape experiences, embrace a multiplicity of voices in representation, analysis and interpretation of phenomena. (Maguire, 2007, p. 7)

The phenomenological stance that I adopt is that individuals construct their own realities by interacting with and experiencing their social worlds. Therefore, importance is placed on how people construct and perceive reality (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). van Manen (1990) described hermeneutical phenomenology as research that focuses on lived experience and "interpreting the texts of life" (p. 4). I feel that this theoretical framework suits my inquiry well since the participants' experiences and motivations are embedded in social and cultural contexts.

Lightfoot (1997) explained why she finds context essential to the research process:

> Context becomes the framework, the reference point, the map. . .it is used to place people and action in time and space and as a resource for understanding what they say and do. The context is rich in clues for interpreting the experience of the actors in the

> setting. We have no idea how to decipher or decode an action, a gesture, a conversation, or an exclamation unless we see it embedded in context. (p. 41)

Personal narratives can describe an important event or aspect of a person's life such as their experiences in school or at work (Chase, 2005); in other words, narratives recount lived experiences. I believe, like Chase that "ordinary people's oral narratives of every day experience are worthy of study" (p. 655). Riessman (2003) argued that "individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities and construct lives" (p. 2). Therefore, "personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned" (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, p. 1). Narrative is also valuable when studying culture. As Riessmann (2003) wrote, "culture 'speaks itself' through an individual's story" (p. 5). Geertz (1973) argued that culture is a context that can be 'thickly' described. Geertz (1983) also recommended focusing on "local knowledges" (p. 167), which is human experience that is embedded in context and unique to each individual doing the experiencing. Narrative allows us to engage with people who are "in the process of interpreting themselves" (Josselson & Lieblich, 1995, p. ix). Narrative inquiry uses narrative or storytelling to make sense of lived experience.

I used both descriptive and interpretive methods to make sense of and represent the multiple experiences and voices of the participants I interviewed. I drew on Maguire and Graves' (2001) definition of voice as "the speaking personality that is recognized, heard, or valued in an utterance or text in a particular context" (p. 564). Furthermore, "every utterance positions the speaker with respect to oneself, other speakers and other socio-cultural groups" (p. 589). Voice refers to what the participant says as well as how he/she says it; it also refers to the "subject positions or social locations from which he or she speaks" (Chase, 2005, p. 657). In

other words, the researcher highlights the participants voice and allows them to express their perceived experiences. Jerome Bruner (1990) approached narrative inquiry or story telling as taking place in a historical time. This makes the event or experience active and infused with meaning, which can be communicated by the storyteller. Attarian (2011) stated that narrative is the "ground on which history (both personal and collective), culture, and language converge" (p. 155). Therefore, voice also refers to what the data is telling us and what we are listening to and for.

Eisenhart (2001) defined culture as the "lifestyle of a social group with clear boundaries and distinctive behaviors and beliefs" (p. 210). Geertz (1973) described culture as a "webs of significance" (p. 5), which gives meaning to our lives and experiences and that involves shared practice and understanding within a society. Culture, then, can be described as the way people view and understand themselves and it also directs individuals' actions in the world. Throughout the research process, I became aware of the impact that my preconceptions, previous experiences, and beliefs may affect the ways I understand and interpret participants' narratives. In the Prologue, I reflected on my linguistic and religious background and I am aware that my perceived experiences growing up as an Arab Muslim-Canadian motivated my interest to do research in this area.

Viewing culture as active, dynamically constructed, and contested within certain contexts allows for an interpretive way of analyzing culture and experience (Eisenhart, 2001). In examining how Arabic is used in Muslim religious practices and beliefs, I situate Islam and Muslims into a cultural framework in that the majority of Muslims, regardless of their linguistic or ethnic backgrounds share common religious practices and beliefs. My experiences being born and raised a Muslim in Canada have given me the ability to speak the language of the setting; in

other words, to possess an intimate understanding of the cultural practices and beliefs of Muslims living in the West.

There is little research that focuses on the identity construction of Muslim-Canadians, especially in relation to the way the Arabic language is used to negotiate and construct identities of Muslims living in the West. I feel that by doing a qualitative inquiry I can contribute to this field of knowledge in some way and pave the way for future research in this area.

Participant Description and Access

I recruited five Muslim-Canadians to participate in this inquiry through formal and informal networks. I first asked family members, including my husband, if they knew anyone who fit the criteria for this study. I used the following criteria: the participant was Muslim by birth or a convert to Islam; they were Canadian or currently living in Canada; male or female; and studied Arabic as a second language in either Egypt or Syria for any period of time. My family members had some friends who fit these criteria and they emailed these potential participants to ask them if they would agree to being interviewed. I did not pursue or follow up with anyone who did not respond to the initial invitation. One participant I recruited was a friend who I had come to know through social gatherings within the Muslim community in Montreal. From previous conversations that we had had, I knew that she had travelled to Egypt to study Arabic, so I approached her about my study and she agreed to be interviewed in her home. I recruited one participant through my husband. My husband knew that this individual had travelled to Syria to study Arabic. The other three participants were recruited through informal networks by contacting friends and acquaintances within the Muslim-Montreal community. Through this process, I realized that I knew two of my other participants from previous social and religious gatherings around Montreal, but I had not known that they had studied Arabic as a

second language. When I contacted them to participate, they remembered me and agreed to be interviewed in their homes. I did not know the fifth participant before recruiting her. I received her contact information from a friend of mine. All interviews were conducted in English. I have changed all of the participants real names to a pseudonym in order to respect confidentiality, privacy and anonymity.

Positioning of Researcher

My linguistic and religious experiences led me to initiate and undertake this research inquiry. I believe that my positioning helped me connect to and with my participants. In his book, "The Interpretation of Cultures", Geertz (1973) explained that ethnographers or researchers who study cultures take both the view of an insider (emic) and outsider (etic). My insider knowledge concerning the basic tenets of faith within the Islamic community proved valuable and constructive throughout this research process. I did not have to probe or inquire into particular religious beliefs or customs because I understood what they were and where they came from, religiously and culturally. When I did not understand a custom, I asked for clarification from the participant. I feel that my insider perspectives of cultural and religious practices and beliefs were valuable because I was able to show sensitivity and understanding towards my participants. After 9/11, many Muslims, including myself, felt that we had to defend or justify our beliefs and we constantly had to explain our religion to people who did not understand it. It can be frustrating to explain to a person what a Muslim is, because we are such a large and diverse community with different and sometimes opposing ideologies and customs. Some Muslims also felt that it was difficult to counteract the negative media attention that perpetuated incorrect Islamic beliefs and practice and which also singled out Muslims and Arabs as being terrorists and a threat to the Western way of life. As a Muslim I felt like I have had to

explain that I can be Muslim and Canadian at the same time, and sometimes I had to prove that I was in fact Canadian, in the sense that I shared Canadian values. Being a Muslim and experiencing the feeling of being defensive allowed me to be particularly sensitive to my participants in this respect. I did not probe or inquire into the details of their faith, and I did not ask my participants to justify their religious beliefs or ideologies. Instead, I focused on questions that dealt with personal experiences in their family life and on their journey to learn Arabic and how it has impacted them as individuals. Showing respect to the diverse religious ideologies of Muslims was important in forming and maintaining relationships with the participants and I felt it helped build the respect and understanding of individual differences. Although Muslims typically have the same fundamental beliefs (i.e., prayer, fasting, charity, the oneness of God), the way these practices are taught to, or manifested in each individual varies. It is this fundamental idea that I hoped to draw from each of my interviews. I wanted each interview to be a descriptive account of a person's unique and individual perceived experience and motivation learning Arabic as a second language. One way I tried to balance power between me and the participants was to provide a little bit of self-disclosure (Abell et al., 2006). I did this by telling stories about myself growing up with an Arab father, but never learning Arabic in childhood. I also talked about memorizing the Quran or listening to it when I was a child and feeling frustrated because I could not understand the words being recited. I think that this self-disclosure helped create a feeling that the relationship between me and the interviewees was on an equal footing, rather than one dominating the other.

Another advantage of being an insider is that I didn't have to ask for translations or explanations of particular phrases that are commonly used by Muslims, whether they are Arab or not. These phrases include "Masha Allah" and "Insha Allah", which were used quite often by

my participants. "Masha Allah" means "as God has willed" and is used to show joy or appreciation for someone or something. For example one can say, "Masha Allah, Syria is beautiful." It is a way that Muslims show their belief that all good and beautiful things come from God. "Insha Allah" means "God willing" and it is used when we talk of future events. For example one can say, "I would like to go back to Egypt to study, Insha Allah."

In my role as a researcher, I was also an outsider. I had never before experienced learning Arabic formally or attended a school or learning institution in the Middle East. I have no personal experiences or feelings toward the education system, and modes of teaching or learning in the Middle East. In this sense, I had a lot to gain and learn from my five participants who served as my eyes and ears into the educational conditions in Syria and Egypt. Another aspect of being an outsider had to do with ethnic background. I am ethnically Arab, but none of my participants are from the Middle East. Each participant had cultural practices and rituals that were different from my own.

Bresler (2002) noted that the "emic/etic productive tension is at the basis of all qualitative research" (p. 22). I am aware of this tension between being an Arab-Muslim and Canadian. My relationship and affiliation with the Muslim community is strong and was present throughout this research process. Being a member of the community, and being a Muslim has helped me formulate my questions and understand and interpret the data. For example, my participants did not have to explain to me the significance of the Quran to the lives of Muslims, but rather I asked them to tell me why being able to read the Quran in Arabic was important for them as individuals, in their personal or religious lives. My multiple and mixed identity as an Arab-Muslim-Canadian gave me the opportunity to take on this research initiative and delve into the

challenges and struggles that Muslim-Canadians are facing in constructing and maintaining their religious identities while living in the West.

Participants

In this section, I introduce the five participants in the inquiry.

Omar.

I interviewed Omar on July 14 and 15, 2011. Omar was born in Toronto and he is Pakistani. He speaks English, French, and Urdu. He moved to Montreal with his family when he was 15 years old, where he began his college studies. He went on to complete a university degree in commerce at Concordia University. Omar was born into a Muslim family, but did not practice his faith until he was 17 years old. In college his friends exposed him to an Islamic ideology that he described as being rigid and strict and he did not feel comfortable with it. When he spoke of this time in his life, he said:

> *Sometimes when you get introduced to something that is brand new for you, you sort of take it a bit too seriously, I think that is what happened with me.* (Interview on July 14, 2011).

In 1999, when he was 18 years old, he decided to travel to Syria.

> *People think I went to learn Islam, but I went more for myself, I felt like I was getting too radical. For me, I hit a wall where I didn't think what people were telling me made sense, so I went to see things in a different light, to see how Muslims practiced things in a Muslim country. It opened my eyes a bit to reality, going over mellowed me out in a bit, in a good way.* (Interview on July 14, 2011)

Omar felt that his trip to Syria was successful in that he learned Arabic and became more 'himself' through the experience. Omar studied Arabic at the University of Damascus,

completing all six levels of study. He also attended private Arabic tutoring sessions with friends he met in Syria who spoke Arabic. At a local Mosque in Syria he studied Tajweed, the art of reading the Quran with proper pronunciation.

Amber.

I interviewed Amber on August 22, 2011. She was born in Montreal, and is a mix of French-Canadian and Eritrean. Her mother is a French-Canadian convert to Islam and her father is Eritrean-born and immigrated to Canada. She speaks French and English fluently and an intermediate level of Arabic. She is currently completing a law degree. She travelled to Cairo when she was 19 years old to study Arabic for one year at a language institute for non-Arab speakers learning Arabic. Before travelling to Egypt, she began learning to read and write in Arabic with a private tutor, and attended a summer Arabic learning program in Toronto. Amber has family members who speak Arabic, and she grew up hearing the language around her but she did not use it to communicate with family members. She learned Arabic as a child for religious purposes only and has been practicing her faith since she was a child. She now wears the veil. While staying with Sudanese family members in Egypt, she experienced culture shock and spoke a lot about gender issues within Middle Eastern culture as well as family expectations and obligations. Her experiences relating to family and cultural expectations impacted her experience in Egypt. She said:

> *Because I was staying with my aunt, I was really immersed, maybe not Egyptian culture but at least Middle Eastern culture. Because they all grew up in Sudan, so they were very Sudanese. Their habits and lifestyle was very different. So many things shocked me. The way they socialize was very demanding. . .you have to pretend you're happy to see them. . . .I find it's very invasive the way they socialize. For example, guests can*

randomly come to your house on a short notice and stay until very late and you are socially expected to host them well. I thought that was very strange.

Aliyah.

I interviewed Aliyah on July 19, 2011. Aliyah is 26 years old and was born in Montreal. She is also Pakistani. She speaks English as her mother tongue, French as a second language, and is able to communicate orally in Urdu with her family members. She is currently completing a Bachelor of general Islamic studies online through the Sharia Academy of America. She wears the veil and the niqab, and speaks of the challenges of wearing the niqab in Montreal. As she said:

Montreal is not a very friendly city but there are some nice people here and there. There are people, you know I am not going to generalize Montreal but there are people who are not informed about Islam, I guess they get the wrong interpretation, you know about women who are covered. It could get sometimes. . .outside when you are walking with your own child, it could get not very nice, you know people would scream at you. But there are some people, who are few, that are nice, that would not really take into account that you are covering your face but are a human being as well, or are a woman especially.

Aliyah is married and has a child. She travelled to Egypt with her husband where she stayed in Alexandria for two months and studied Arabic full time with a private tutor. She recalled that when she was a child, her parents put a lot of emphasis on teaching her to read and memorize the words of the Quran. Priority was not on reading and memorizing for meaning, but rather reading and memorizing for the reward from God. She recalled spending a lot of time

reading and memorizing but not understanding what she was reading. She described this emphasis on reading and memorizing without meaning as a "Pakistani Muslim cultural practice."

Laila.

I interviewed Laila on August 25, 2011. Laila is 29 years old, and was born in Somalia. She moved to the United States when she was seven years old. After two years in New York, she moved with her family to a small town outside of Ottawa, Ontario. She completed an Honors degree in political science with a minor in economics at McGill University. After that she worked for the government in emergency management. She is married and has a child. In 2007, she travelled to Egypt with her husband where she studied Arabic in Cairo full time for seven months with a private tutor. Laila did not grow up in a practicing Muslim family, but she learned the Arabic letters and the opening chapter of the Quran (sura al-Fatiha) when she was a child. She began to practice her faith at the age of 18. When she started university, her connections to Muslims through the Muslim Students Association at McGill University solidified her faith. She began to seek knowledge of her religion and actively practice it. She also began to wear the veil.

Samira.

I interviewed Samira on August 16, 2011. Samira was born in Vancouver and is of South Asian descent. She is completing a Masters at the University of Ottawa. Although she was born into a Muslim family, she began to practice her faith at the age of 15. In her twenties she contemplated whether she was practicing her religion only because the experience contained happy memories. She explained this in the following way:

At a certain point I wondered if I was just. . .practicing because. . .I just felt good about the things that I was doing. . .such as prayer and so on. Simply because there was a kind

> *of nostalgia associated with them, or I had good experiences. . . .Whenever my dad would talk to me about God or when he would invite me to pray with him, it was always a very positive experience, so when as I got older - into my twenties - I wondered if I just liked doing those things as one likes doing certain things because of good childhood memories.*

She went on to explain that this uncertainty about why she was practicing her religion led her to:

> *explore the classical writings of Islam, through people like Imam al-Ghazali who went through their own processes of questioning and reaching* actual knowledge *of the Divine, rather than just a simple belief.* (Interview, August 16, 2011)

Being able to access such texts sparked her interest in learning Arabic as a second language; she studied Arabic in Syria when she was 19 years old, at the University of Damascus for 15 months. She was exposed to Arabic in childhood, listening to the Quran at home, but she did not use Arabic in any way for communication, nor did she understand the Quran when recordings of its recitation were played in her home.

The participants are ethnically Pakistani, Somali, Ugandan, and Eritrean-Quebecois. They were either born in Canada, or came to Canada when they were in elementary school. All of them currently live in Canada; four in Montreal and one in Ottawa. All participants are Muslim by birth, but not all of them were practicing their religion from childhood. One participant practiced her religion from when she was a child. For example she prayed regularly and fasted the month of Ramadan. The other four participants began to practice their religion when they were in their late teens or early twenties due to various life circumstances and situations. I specifically chose to interview Muslims who had not used Arabic for daily communication in childhood. My purpose for this criterion was that I wanted to differentiate

between Arabic-use for cultural maintenance or ethnic affiliation and Arabic-use for religious purposes.

Berry (1997) argued that cultural maintenance identifies the degree of how cultural identity is central to a particular group and to what extent the practice of maintaining a culture is strived for. Language is an expression of ethnic identity (Geertz, 1973) and although language is influential in establishing ethnicity (Rosowsky, 2008); it is also extremely important in the construction and maintenance of religious identity and various religious practices. For example, Muslims cannot fulfill their obligatory five daily prayers without reading the first chapter of the Quran, Surah al-Fatiha, in Arabic (Jaspal & Coyle, 2010).

Taking cultural maintenance and religious identity into consideration, my criteria for choosing participants is that they identified themselves as practicing Muslims; they identified themselves as being Canadian, and they did not grow up using Arabic to communicate with others.

Research Site and Process

Through in-depth, focused, and informal narrative style interviews, I examined the participants' self-reported motivations, experiences, and perceptions of how they perceive the Arabic language as being valuable to their religious identities and practices. I tried to ensure that my participants did not feel that they were under any obligation to be interviewed. Nor were any of my contacts under any pressure to help me recruit participants. Each participant I interviewed expressed interest in this study and we made arrangements to meet at a time and location that best suited their schedule.

I did face-to-face interviews with the four participants who lived in Montreal. I interviewed three in their homes and one participant at his work place. The interviews I

conducted at participant's homes consisted of one interview only (one visit) and lasted approximately two hours. The interviews I conducted at one participant's workplace was conducted over a period of two days and lasted one hour each day during his lunch break. I conducted one interview over the phone with the participant who lives in Ottawa; this lasted approximately two hours. I used speakerphone and a recording device to audio record this telephone interview. I audio taped each face to face interview so that I could re-listen to the exact words participants used to describe their perceived experiences and motivations learning Arabic. I also reflected on my own culture from another's point of view. Myers (1996), a cultural anthropologist, explained this phenomenon of understanding our own culture through someone else's lens in the following eloquent manner:

> Like fish in the ocean, we are so immersed in our culture that we must leap out of it to understand it. There is no better way to learn the norms of our culture than to visit another culture and see that its members do things that way, while we do them this way. (p. 131)

This highlights the importance of engaging in self-reflexivity throughout the process of an inquiry. I did this by taking time after each interview to ponder my own assumptions about learning Arabic, and the value that the Arabic language has to me. I also took time after each interview to think about my own upbringing as a Muslim, my religious identity, and the challenges I have experienced in constructing my Muslim identity in Canada. For example, the challenges I face wearing the veil in Montreal and staying away from social settings, such as restaurants that serve alcohol. Some issues I have thought about and considered are my personal investment in this inquiry, and previous assumptions and values I have regarding whether Muslims should in fact learn Arabic in order to read the Quran in its original text or read the

translation of the Quran in their heritage language. I have also reflected on my own early religious experiences, both positive and negative.

During the research process both the researcher and the participants co-create meaning during an interview. Russell and Bohan (1999) argued that "reflexivity refers to the fact that when we study human beings we cannot stand apart from our own humanity" (p. 404). Wall (2006) described reflexivity as a practice "in which the researcher pauses for a moment to think about how his or her presence, standpoint, or characteristics might have influenced the outcome of the research process" (p. 3). Auto-ethnographer Etherington (2004) interpreted research reflexivity "as the capacity of the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences and contexts (which might be fluid and changing) inform the process and outcomes of inquiry" (p. 31). She argued that this reflexivity should be attained through an awareness of

> "how our own thoughts, feelings, culture, environment and social and personal history inform us as we dialogue with participants, transcribe their conversations with us and with our representations of the work" (pp. 31-32).

To gain insights and understanding into the journeys and perceived experiences of the participants, I transcribed each interview and drew out major themes that emerged. From these themes, I analyzed the data, taking into consideration both my fluid insider role and outsider role as researcher. Through my insider perspective, I was able to understand the various Islamic cultural behaviours of the participants. Through my outsider role, I attempted to understand the participants' perceived experiences of learning a second language. If there was any point during our interview that was not clear for me, I always asked the participant for elaboration or clarification. Participants also had an opportunity to read and revise their participant description

in Chapter 4, as well as the excerpts from our interviews and my analysis of them. All five participants responded to this offer.

During the interviews, I did not pressure the participants to disclose any information they did not feel comfortable talking about, including their level of religiosity and the degree to which they practiced their faith in the past and present. One question in particular that was sensitive to them was "how much Quran have you memorized?" They hesitated or would not state exactly how much Quran they memorized. Omar responded to the question as follows:

> *I was memorizing on my own. . .I would rather not say, but it was quite significant, I was pretty surprised, you know, you get these, when you do things for Allah, you get these weird powers.* (Omar – July 14th, 2011)

Omar expressed how he was able to memorize the Quran and learn Arabic quite easily because his intention was to please God. He later compared his experience of learning Arabic and the Quran to learning French, which he felt was more difficult because he did not feel the same motivation or intention to learn it. I felt that my positioning as an insider helped me to understand why my participants did not want to divulge how much Quran they have memorized and why this was a sensitive issue. The Quran says "And the servants of the Merciful are those who walk on the earth in humility" (Qur'an 25:63). Therefore, a characteristic of being a Muslim is to show humility. Our shared religious affiliation gave me a sensitivity to these and other religious topics during the interviews.

Ethical Considerations

As Stake (2005) wrote, "qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict" (p. 459). When interviewing for social science research there are sometimes risks which may occur. Participants

may not want to discuss personal issues or specific topics. Also, during the interview process, the participant may learn something about themselves; they may come to a self-realization about who they are, what their intentions are or who they have become. This realization of who they have become for instance might be a source of sadness or discomfort for them. In the case of this study, the five participants travelled to Syria and Egypt to learn Arabic, a language very closely tied to the practice of the Islamic faith. If they felt that they had not benefited from learning Arabic in a positive way, or they have not used the Arabic they learnt to better themselves or to learn about their faith more, it could bring up feelings of sadness or inadequacy.

Something else I considered as a possible ethical issue is that because my family is from Syria and some of the participants shared their perceived experiences studying and living in Syria, they may have felt shy to mention any negative feelings or experiences in Syria. They could have felt that their honesty with me could offend me. During our interviews I showed understanding and sometimes agreed with them about the negative aspect of Syrian society or politics. For instance, Syria is a country that is tightly controlled by its government, and suspicious visitors or locals are sometimes stopped in the street for no reason and interrogated by the police. This is a reality of Syria that I am aware of and I shared this awareness with my participants who travelled to Syria. By sharing this understanding I hoped to make them feel more comfortable sharing their true perceived experiences and feelings with me. I told them that their honesty and openness was what would make this research inquiry a success and that in no way would I take offence to anything they said about my family's country of origin.

Some researchers believe that there are issues that relate to conducting research with Muslims by Muslims. Sometimes when the participants and the researcher share the same religious background, there can be an assumption that they understand one another and therefore

certain experiences or feelings may not need to be shared or discussed. This is problematic for research such as this because it may hinder the exploration of certain ideas or assumptions that are made about Muslims. The researcher and participants need to have enough distance from one another to ensure that the perceived motivations and experiences are not taken for granted and assumed by the researcher (Seidman, 1998). Bruce (2011) summed up this phenomenon of a shared worldview as follows: "If everyone shares the same beliefs, they are not beliefs; they are just how the world is" (p. 37). When people live within what Berger (1967) writes about in his book "Sacred Canopy" , the natural result is that "people make sense of their lives through religion without being aware of doing so" (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012, p. 531). The lack of awareness may alter or get in the way of the understanding that the participants have about their world views and perceptions of their experiences. However, there are positive results when Muslims engage in research with Muslims. For instance, it can be argued that when the participants and researcher share the same ethnicity or religion, in other words when religious matching exists, it is less likely that the researcher will stereotype their participants (Abbas, 2010). There are also ethical debates within social research concerning who is best suited to carry out research with certain ethnic or religious groups. A cursory look at this debate shows that minority researchers are best suited to carry out research with their own communities (Abbas 2010; Voas & Fleischmann 2012). When participants are not labelled or stereotyped by the researcher, there is a better chance that they will give authentic accounts of experiences and ways of seeing the world (Abbas, 2010). The belief that "religious matching" would produce more "authentic" descriptions of participants stories is related to other issues of "power, identity and demography" (Abbas, 2010, p. 127). The researcher may be unaware of their own stereotypes or

lack of awareness or understanding of certain "religious, cultural or ethnic issues" (Abbas, 2010, p. 127).

Furthermore, there may be issues within particular marginalized ethnic or religious communities that are deemed inappropriate to research altogether, or they could even be considered non-issues within that community (Abbas, 2010). When conducting research with Muslims, there is a chance that the researcher may be seen as a "social intruder" (Abbas, 2010, p. 127). The result of this perceived social intrusion on the part of the researcher, is that participants may not disclose their true personal or religious beliefs due to fear of being exposed, misunderstood, or misrepresented. This is a fear that Muslims may have, in light of the sensitivity towards certain religious topics that have been highlighted repeatedly in the media such as misrepresentation of women in Islam, the controversy surrounding the niqab, or the views that Muslims may have about Western governments, societies, or foreign policies. Needless to say this ethical debate is complicated and complex, and many researchers in the social research field would argue that sameness or difference do not have an impact on the relationship between researched and researcher. Martin (1987) situated this dilemma very well when she described her "outsider within" (Collins, 1986, p. S14) status as an indigenous woman doing research on women's reproduction. She aptly described it as follows:

> That women's responses in our interviews were obvious to me is a way of saying that I felt as much at home hearing them as a fish in water. As an anthropologist, my problem was to find a vantage point from which to see the water I had lived in all my life. (p. 11)

Therefore the dilemma here is that a social intruder may be "culture blind", but an indigenous researcher may be "blinded by the familiar" (Bolak, 1997, p. 97). This dilemma is one I face as a Muslim researcher conducting research with Muslim participants.

As Abbas (2010) articulated, "the role of the researcher is fundamentally important in the collection of research data and the development of new sociological and humanities thinking on Islam and Muslims" (p. 133). Collins (1986) argued that when researchers "trust their own personal and cultural biographies as significant sources of knowledge" (p. 29), they can contribute in an intellectual, enlightening way to their field of study (Bolak, 1997). Collins (1986) referred to this as "outsider within" (p. S14) status and pointed out that using our location and position can be a great source of expertise. I will close this section on ethical considerations with one final remark that I believe sums up my beliefs concerning the relationship between researched and researcher as well as conducting research with Muslims.

> Being and knowing are central to an experience and appreciation of the social world and how they are characterised by religion, ethnicity, class and gender is crucial to the understanding of the researched, but also important is how the researcher views and relates to these factors. (p. 134)

Summary

In this chapter, I explained how I used personal narrative to collect my data and how post modern theory and phenomenology played a role in how I collected, interpreted, and analyzed the data. I also described the participants and explained ethical issues I considered during the research process.

Chapter 5: Data and Data Analysis

> *I wondered if the reason I felt good about doing some of the things I was doing, actions, such as prayer, was simply because there was a nostalgia associated with them. As a child, whenever my dad would talk to me about God or invite me to pray with him, it was always a positive experience, so I just wondered if I liked doing those things because they were associated with good feelings from childhood. I guess that made me expose myself to the classical writings of Islam, of people like Imam al-Ghazali who went through their own processes of questioning and reached actual knowledge and experience of the Divine rather than just unquestioned belief.* (Samira, telephone interview, August 16, 2011)

Introduction

In the above excerpt from a conversation about her early childhood religious experiences, Samira is reflective and reflexive. Language learners are faced with many opportunities to create and re-create themselves, as Giddens (1991) explained:

> The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice filtered through abstract systems. . . .The more tradition loses hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options. (p. 5)

As Samira looked back on her childhood experiences, she wondered if her attachment to her faith was a result of the positive experiences she had growing up. This self-questioning eventually led her to examine her faith more closely through the works of traditional Islamic

scholars, such as al-Ghazali. This in turn led her on a path of self-reflection about the choices she made in her life as a result of her early religious experiences.

In this chapter, I examine the roles that reflectiveness and reflexiveness have on the identity construction processes of second language learners and my positioning as a researcher. I then draw out the themes that emerged throughout the interviews with the five participants and discuss their relevance to language learning and religious identity construction after studying Arabic as a second language in Egypt and Syria.

I asked participants about aspects of their language learning experiences through the following three questions: (1) What was your motivation to travel abroad and learn Arabic as a second language?; (2) What were your experiences and perceptions studying Arabic abroad?; and (3) How has learning Arabic impacted different aspects of your life and your identity as a Muslim-Canadian? I have organized my discussion in this chapter around three major themes, which emerged from the interpretation of the data: (1) social investment in learning Arabic as a second language; (2) the role of language in the construction of a Muslim religious identity; and (3) social and environmental issues related to traveling abroad to learn a language, such as interactions with locals and cultural norms found within that society. The five individuals' perspectives provide understandings of the experiences of Muslim-Canadians who actively seek a place for themselves in the Islamic religion while living in Canada.

I conducted personal one on one interviews with each of my participants in order to collect the data for this inquiry. During these personal narratives, I invited the participants to share their language learning experiences with me. I aimed to gather thick descriptions of their perceived experiences. I used personal narrative analysis to analyze my data. Riessman (2003) wrote that "individuals construct past events and actions in personal narratives to claim identities

and construct lives" (p. 2). Therefore, "personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one's life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned" (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, p. 1). Narrative is also valuable when studying culture. As Riessman (2003) argued "culture 'speaks itself' through an individual's story" (p. 5). I utilized narrative inquiry because Geertz (1983) recommends focusing on "local knowledges", or human experience that is embedded in context and unique to each individual doing the experiencing.

Social Investment in Learning Arabic as a Second Language

By conceptualizing investment as a counterpart to motivation, Norton (1995) emphasized the role that power structures, identity, history, and social worlds play in language learning. The concept of social investment in language learning assumes that a language learner has a complex and fluid social identity and numerous aspirations and desires. One reason individuals choose to maintain their heritage language is the important role language has in determining and asserting ethnicity (Rosowsky, 2008). Also for those who value and practice a religion, religion also may have linguistic requirements. As I have already discussed, this is certainly the case for Muslims; likewise, in the Sikh religion, the Sikh holy book is recited aloud in Gurmukhi (Singh, 2005). As I discussed in Chapter 4, the participants in my inquiry have diverse ethnic backgrounds such as Pakistani, Somali, Eritrean, and French-Canadian. They also live, study, and work in Canada and are practicing Muslims. Each identity carries with it a linguistic identity, whether it is a national identity such as being Canadian (English or French), ethnic such as being Pakistani (Urdu or Punjabi), or religious, such as being Muslim (Arabic). It is possible that each identity is compartmentalized and thus require distinct linguistic abilities and knowledge in order to maintain and live with each identity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002); however, it is important to mention that not all individuals have the capability of compartmentalizing their identities.

I asked participants to reflect on their goals for learning Arabic. They stressed a common reason, which was to improve their religious practices by increasing their knowledge of Islam. Consider Aliyah's statements about why she wanted to learn to read the Quran in Arabic. Aliyah is Pakistani and was born and raised in Canada:

> *My main goal. . .to understand the Quran. Now I read words and it triggers meaning for me. Before it was monotone, I didn't understand a thing; I would just listen to the recitors' voice.* (Aliyah, personal interview, July 19, 2011)

Aliyah, like many non-Arab Muslims, would listen to the Quran being recited even though she never understood the words being said. Many Muslims listen to the recitation of the Quran in Arabic in order to benefit from the blessings of listening to the Quran and to receive comfort from hearing the beautiful recitations.

Omar recalled why he wanted to learn Arabic and why he felt it was important for him:

> *I was jealous [of people who could read the Quran in Arabic]. When you read it in English it's not the same, the words, they are powerful, when you translate it into English it's not the same. When you read it in Arabic, you feel the power of it, you know it is a book that only a higher being can come up with.* (Omar, personal interview, July 15, 2011)

Omar's desire to read the Quran in Arabic stems from his belief that it is a holy book. He feels jealous of people who can read it because he feels that there are great benefits and advantages to being able to read the holy book in Arabic. In this way Omar, identifies being a good Muslim with being able to read the Quran in Arabic.

Omar expressed his social investment in learning Arabic by seeking out the experience of traveling and meeting new people from a different culture. He said: "*I went to see things in a*

different light, to see how Muslims practiced things in a Muslim country" (Omar, personal interview, July 14, 2011). Before Omar went to Syria, he was conflicted about how he saw Islam being practiced among his friends in Montreal. He did not feel that he was being himself when he was practicing Islam in this strict manner, and traveling to Syria gave him an opportunity to not only learn Arabic but to see how Islam is practiced and lived in a Muslim country.

Samira reflected on why she felt it was important for her to read the Quran in its original classical text:

> *Reading Quran in Arabic, you feel that the words are addressing you, and that alone is enough of a reason to learn Arabic. I wouldn't expect you to read a letter to me from my husband, I want to read it myself. This is essential; because this is a personal relationship between you and God. In Arabic it hits you in such a particular way, and I don't think you can always get that with the English. Me, I want to hear God. . .if you like. I don't want to hear God's Word through someone else's interpretation.* (Samira, telephone interview, August 16, 2011)

Samira reflected on the personal relationship she feels with the Quran and how it impacts her as an individual. She feels a personal connection with God's words and it is important for her to be able to understand them for herself rather than having to read the translation in English.

Each participant expressed how important it was for them as Muslims to read and understand the Quran in Arabic. I asked them if they felt that it should be an obligation for every Muslim to learn to read and understand the Quran in its original Arabic language. Aliyah responded:

> *Yes, definitely. God chose Arabic as the language in the Quran. I find that a lot of people will take a quote out of context when they are learning Islam, for their own purposes. So when you read it in its sources and knowing all of the scholars of the past did it in Arabic and they did understand the language of the Quran, then it is a definite obligation in order not to confuse yourself or have the wrong understanding of your religion.* (Aliyah, personal interview, July 19, 2011)

Aliyah has a sense of obligation to culturally identify with a language foreign to her origin; the obligation does not find itself in the knowledge of the cultural identity itself. In Islam, it is not mandatory to read the Quran in Arabic, but Aliyah feels that it is imperative for her to know Arabic in order to construct her Muslim identity.

She went on to say that

> *Islam is so simple, it is for all people of all times, they can learn Islam even if they don't know Arabic, but if you want to really grasp what God is saying, then learn Arabic.* (Aliyah, personal interview, July 19, 2011)

I think that Aliyah found a love for her Pakistani cultural identity and also a way to embody, appreciate, and internalize the Muslim cultural identity through the study of Arabic.

Omar felt that, "*it is important for all Muslims to learn Arabic; it should be an obligation*" (Omar, personal interview, July 15, 2011). Contrary to Omar's belief, Laila felt that Muslims do not need to be able to read and understand the Quran in order to be 'good' Muslims. She explained that "*they only need to know Surah al Fatiha*" (the opening chapter of the Quran) (Laila, personal interview, August, 25, 2011) in order to fulfill the obligation to do the five daily prayers. The prayers that are recited during the five daily prayers of Muslims are taken directly from the Quran itself.

While Laila identifies with her own ethnic background as Somalian, her opinion is indicative of her Islamic upbringing. She feels that Arabic is a vessel or tool that can be used to understand Islam, rather than viewing Arabic as a cultural link to a particular identity. For Laila, Arabic is used to gain knowledge about Islam, but a person can be a 'good' Muslim without knowing Arabic.

Strengthening Spirituality and Religious Beliefs

I asked participants why they prefer to read the Quran in Arabic, rather than their heritage language. In their responses, they all recognized the holiness of the Arabic language. For instance, Aliyah said:

> *In English, I read it before and there is nothing wrong with it, it is amazing, when I read it in English it's like wow Subhanallah. . . .In terms of translating the Quran from one language to another, it loses its beauty. It's like translating a Shakespearean poem into French; you are not going to have its beauty in it anymore. And how God can use one word but it can mean so many things. And just to be able to learn Arabic in that sense I would like to have that type of real understanding, connect with it, not just read it for the sake of reading, or for the sake of getting blessings. But to connect with what God is saying.* (Aliyah, personal interview, July 19, 2011)

Aliyah views the Quran as a cultural resource meant to be read and understood by followers of Islam. In this way, Aliyah believes that she can gain the knowledge she needs to be able to practice her faith. This cultural knowledge would give her the information needed on how to act in the world and what to believe about the world she lives in.

When Samira explained why she feels it is important for her to read the Quran in Arabic, she highlighted a controversy concerning some of the verses in the Quran:

> *The translation will be different from one edition to another and you don't know what to believe. And orientalists take advantage of the poor translation - 'this is what your religion says about women, etc.' In reading the original, you get a sense of who God is and get a sense of how He is speaking to you. I admire people who can read the English with such dedication; I always felt that it didn't grip me.* (Samira, telephone interview, August 16, 2011)

Having the ability to read and understand the Quran has empowered Samira to resist the misinterpretations that some people have about the Islamic religion. It is very easy to choose a verse from the Quran, read it in English, and decide for one self what that verse means. However, when it comes to the Quran and other revealed religious texts there is a context or a story behind each verse. For example, there is a verse in the Quran that reads:

> But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Alah is ever Exalted and Grand. (Quran 4:34)

Many people interpret this verse to mean that men are allowed to hit or beat their wives. However the Arabic word 'wadriboohunna' has other meanings in Classical Arabic, such as to put forth. This verse also contradicts the actions and teachings of Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h), who repeatedly urged men to be kind and merciful to their wives. One famous saying of the Prophet is, "The best of you are those who are best to their wives." Also, in the Quran it says in chapter 30, verse 21, "And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect" (translation by Yusuf Ali). Therefore, taking a verse and quickly ascribing a meaning to it is incorrect and not reliable. In

the previous conversation with Samira, she is showing that she feels a sense of responsibility to be able to first understand these often misunderstood verses and be able to explain them to those who need or ask for an explanation. In this way she is acting in defence of her religion, which is, sadly, often misunderstood and misrepresented.

In “The Meaning of the Glorious Koran”, which was translated into English by Mohammed M. Pickthall (1997), the foreword, which is written by the translator, says that "the Koran cannot be translated. . . .It [a translation] can never take the place of the Koran in Arabic, nor is it meant to do so" (p. 7). The translator, thus, believes that the true essence of the Quran cannot be captured in translation.

Among Muslims and Arabs, Arabic is considered to be a God-given language. The participants repeatedly commented on their belief that Arabic was a holy language. The Quran, which is considered to be the true words of God, is believed to represent the "highest linguistic achievement of the Arabic language" (Chejni, 1965, p. 451). The intimate relationship between Arabic and Islam is often reflected in the attitudes and beliefs of Muslims (Chejni, 1965). Ferguson (1982) believed “that all religious belief systems include some beliefs about language” (p. 103). Adherents to some religions, like that of Islam and Hinduism, believe that their sacred texts should not and cannot be translated. In Islam, there is a difference of opinion among scholars as to whether or not the Quran can or should be translated into other languages.

I grew up reading and memorizing the Quran, but I always felt a disconnect between what I was reciting and my beliefs. I felt that in order for my beliefs to be strong I should understand the text that I was reading. I always believed that the Quran was a way for God to speak to me. However, because I could not understand the exact words that God was saying in Arabic, I felt that I was disconnected from my faith. I can now recognize and feel the beauty of

the Quran when I hear it being recited by famous Sheikhs around the world, such as Abdul Basit Abdul Samad. I feel at peace when I hear the recitation in Arabic and I don't get that same feeling of peace and connection to God as when I hear it in English.

Many Muslims believe in the supremacy of the Arabic language by way of the Quran and reinforce the necessity of learning this language. Through learning and memorizing the Quran, believers are able to achieve a high reward in heaven (Chejni, 1965). The Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) said: "The best act of worship by my community is the recitation of the Quran. The best among you is he who learns and teaches the Quran. The people of God and His favourites are those of the Quran" (Boorstin, 1985, p. 504). 'Amr b. al-'As, a general who conquered Egypt reportedly said that "[e]ach verse of the Quran represents a step to Heaven and a lantern in your house" (Chejni, 1965, p. 453). Imam Al-Shafi'i who lived from 767-820 CE, is considered the founder of Islamic Jurisprudence. Jurisprudence is the study of law and theory and Imam Al-Shafi'i based his Islamic rulings on the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h) (Abu Zahra, 2001). Imam Al-Shafi'i believed that "every Muslim must learn the Arabic language in order to recite the Holy Book" (Chejne, 1969, p. 12). He also stated:

> He who learns more of this language, made by God, the language of the Seal of the Prophets and the medium through which was revealed his last Book, would gain an added advantage. (Chejni, 1965, p. 454)

The importance of the Arabic language for Muslims is undeniable, Muslims use the Quran in order to understand their faith, understand their beliefs in God and the universe and to know what is expected of them as Muslims. From the Quran, Muslims learn about how to be in the world, how to treat others and what is deemed important and of value in the world. For example,

Muslims are taught to place greater value on family and relationships than on material wealth and gain. Through these learned practices, values and beliefs, the Muslim self emerges.

Geertz (1984) theorized the concept of the 'self' as it is represented and acted out within different cultures. He examined Balinese, Javanese and Moroccan societies intensively, looking at how the "people who live there define themselves as persons, what goes into the idea they have of what a self, Javanese, Balinese, or Moroccan style is" (p. 58). He compared these notions of self and identity to the Western concept of self, explaining that:

> The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgement, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures. (p. 126)

Geertz, argued that the Western concept of self is a distinct and free individual who may enter and leave social groups and situations as they please. Western people pride themselves on their individuality and individual freedoms; to be valued within Western society a person must "distinguish themselves from others and identify those characteristics, attributes, abilities, and ways of being that make one unique and special" (Cross & Gore, 2012, p. 588). A Western notion of the self is very different from other cultural perspectives of the self, where individuals are interdependent and support one another mutually (Cross & Gore, 2012). Within non-Western cultures, such as Asian or Middle Eastern cultures "to be a person - to know oneself and one's place in the world - one must be a part of groups (families, work groups, and communities)" (Cross & Gore, 2012, p. 588). Many Islamic rulings are based on the belief that what is good for society as a whole is good for the individual. For instance, one of the reasons

alcohol is forbidden in Islam is because of the harm it could cause to others within society. Harm that can be caused by drunk driving, or domestic abuse caused by alcohol are believed to harm society as a whole and not just the individuals involved. Therefore, alcohol is forbidden for the individual in order to create a peaceful society for all.

Overall, the participants all highlighted the importance of learning Arabic for strengthening their spirituality and religious beliefs.

Possible Selves

Throughout the interviews with participants, they each made statements about their investments in language learning that could point to the possible selves (Dornyei, 2009) they wished to have. This was especially the case with Aliyah. She expressed an "ideal L2 self" in this comment:

> *Two years ago when I was at Taraweeh* [the nightly prayers done during Ramadan], *I was wishing to understand the Quran.* (Aliyah, personal interview, July 19, 2011)

Aliyah imagined herself in the future as someone who can understand the Quran recitation that is done during the nightly prayers in the holy month of Ramadan. This realization motivated her to "*take concrete lessons, actually take steps to learning Arabic*." In the next conversation, Aliyah described what Dornyei (2009) would refer to as an "ought-to L2 self". She said that it is "*a definite obligation in order not to confuse yourself* [with the meaning of the Quran] *or have the wrong understanding of your religion*" (Aliyah, personal interview, July 19, 2011).

Here she might be pointing to a possible negative outcome that could arise if she did not learn Arabic as a second language, which is that she may misunderstand something that is

written in the Quran, or possibly take it out of context. Aliyah felt that she "ought to" learn Arabic so that she does not misunderstand the message that the Quran is trying to convey.

Belonging

All participants report that they were influenced in some way by the social contact with their own culture and the Middle Eastern culture. Second language learners may enact different cultural identities depending on their social environments, who they are with or how they wish to be identified in that particular moment. Belonging is about feeling accepted in a particular group. A person who feels they belong within a group may identify more strongly with that group. Hall (2003) challenged the notion of a fixed origin or sense of belonging. Rather, he argued that due to globalization people may feel a sense of belonging to people in all parts of the world; they may connect on an ethnic, religious, cultural, or linguistic level. This was expressed by Amber, who feels that she "*doesn't belong here or there*" (Amber, personal interview, August 22, 2011). Rampton (1990) wrote that "it is socio-linguistically inaccurate to think of people belonging to only one social group, once and for all" (p. 98). People associate with many different people, through work, family relationships, and school. Furthermore, Rampton (1997b) suggested that being "neither on the inside nor on the outside, being affiliated but not fully belonging" (p. 330) is normal in today's globalized world and may be considered an enlightening experience for individuals. He also suggested that people should learn to live with difference; in other words, people should learn to live with being excluded from groups that they want to be a part of or that they are already a part of on a daily basis. By learning to live with difference, we learn new ways of being and acting in the world through interactions with those who are different from us. We also grow to be more accepting of people who think, behave, or speak

differently than us. Learning to live with others who are different than us is essential when living in a pluralistic, multicultural, multilingual society such as Canada.

People may feel a sense of belonging in many ways:

> Identity is about belonging, about what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others. . . .Each of us live with a variety of potentially contradictory identities, which battle within us for allegiance: as men or women, black or white, straight or gay, able-bodied or disabled, 'British' or 'European'. . . .The list is potentially infinite, and so therefore are our possible belongings. Which of them we focus on, bring to the fore, 'identify' with, depends on a host of factors. At the centre, however, are the values we share or wish to share with others. (Weeks, 1990, p. 88)

Aliyah felt that she belonged to the Arabic language community in Egypt:

> *After having learned Arabic, you see the world so differently. I think it's any language that you learn, you see the people who speak that language differently, and you feel some kind of connection towards them. It's a language that you know and they know and it links you to them. It changes your perception, that you know how to communicate with someone now and you know, that barrier has been lifted because you speak their language. Any language would open that connection.* (Aliyah, personal interview, July 19, 2011)

Feeling a sense of belonging to a particular language community can motivate individuals to participate in different social groups and take more opportunities to communicate with the target language community. Aliyah identifies with the Arabic culture; rather than looking at language as a tool to gain knowledge, for Aliyah, Arabic is a means to being identified as belonging to an Arabic language community and culture. Language has become an integral part

of Aliyah's life and a way for her to culturally identify herself as a Muslim. Aliyah showed that she feels that language provides access to a people and makes it possible to learn from their culture. Learning a new language gave her the opportunity to open herself to experiences in another culture. While Aliyah was immersed in an Arabic speaking society, she felt a sense of belongingness. Knowledge of the culture and identification with the culture is important to the extent to which she values that language and what that language means to her. For instance, learning German fluently may not evoke the same emotional attachment or sense of belonging to the German speaking community as Arabic did for these participants and their sense of belonging to a Muslim community.

Samira also expressed a sense of belonging and participation in a new language community:

> *I have been able to take part in the community that I wouldn't be able to take part in if I weren't able to speak that language.* (Samira, telephone interview, August 16, 2011)

Kanno and Norton (2003) agreed that learning a new language can give people an awareness of a constantly evolving imagined community, and create feelings of attachment to people worldwide. Kanno and Norton (2003) argued that "imagined communities expand our range of possible selves" (p. 246). Norton (2001) highlighted that "a learner's imagined community invite[s] an imagined identity, and a learner's investment in the target language must be understood within this context" (p. 166). Feeling attachment to others extends through space and time: "imagining ourselves bonded with our fellow compatriots across space and time, we can feel a sense of community with people we have not yet met, but perhaps hope to meet one day" (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 241).

Laila talked about how people think that she is an Arab and try to speak to her in Arabic quite often, and that learning Arabic has helped her participate in the Arab community more:

> *What is also helpful is that I can communicate with more people, because a lot of people assume that I am an Arab so they would speak to me in whatever dialect and I would do my best to make out what they are saying, so that has helped.* (Laila, personal interview, August, 25, 2011)

She feels that knowing Arabic "*gives you more literacies to the Muslim community and cultures*" (Laila, August, 25, 2011). Laila gave an example of the interconnectedness between investment and identity. She found that because she learned Arabic, she can now participate in different social contexts, such as Arabic social gatherings where lessons on Islam are given in Arabic, which she may not have been able to be a part of before learning Arabic.

Language learners who study abroad may have the ability and power to shape their own learning experiences. They may accept or reject the language and cultural practices they encounter (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). By either accepting or rejecting the linguistic and cultural practices of the target language community, they inevitably contribute to or hinder their language learning success. Through my interviews, the participants claimed that their experiences were not only focused on learning a language, but also about learning the cultural practices of the host culture and the ways in which the host culture uses languages in their every day practice. Ochs (2002) argued that language learning does not only involve the acquisition of language but rather it also encompasses the process of becoming a part of a society. Language learners may gradually take up specific roles and relationships when they are able to pick up how their host culture uses language appropriately and accurately (Kinginger, 2009). Whether second language learners in study abroad contexts are successful or not, depends on how their host

community receives them, accepts them, and helps them to integrate into society (Norton, 2000). It may also depend on whether the language learners experienced frustration when they tried to interact or communicate with locals or if locals were accepting of the foreigners' attempt to speak their language.

Early Language Experiences

During the interviews, I invited participants to talk about their early language learning experiences. How they were first exposed to Arabic? Who first taught them Arabic? How do they feel now about those early childhood experiences? These are important questions for this inquiry because an individual's identity or sense of self develops from their childhood as they grow up in particular social settings (family, ethnic group, etc.). However, our social identities change due to interactions and contact with others and our willingness or desire to open up to other experiences and environments (Jackson, 2008).

Aliyah talked about being raised as a Pakistani and a Muslim and how both identities were given importance during her childhood.

> *In the Pakistani culture, we have things that are embedded from Islam into our culture, I felt like because I was Pakistani that I had to be Muslim.* (Aliyah, personal interview, July 19, 2011)

As a child, being a Muslim and being Pakistani were one and the same. She felt that in order to be a good Pakistani she had to be a good Muslim and vice versa. In her family, being a good Muslim meant reading the Quran regularly and often. She was sent to a weekend Quran school where she was taught to read Arabic. As she said, "*It is custom in the Pakistani culture to read the Quran every day and memorize it, we are keen on memorizing*." She went on to explain that although she could read the Quran in Arabic, she was not taught to properly pronounce the

letters and words in Arabic, or to understand the words that she was reading. Her first experiences learning Arabic was "*reciting the Quran when we were young. The Tajweed was not proper, and we could not understand anything*." She did not begin to memorize the Quran until she started practicing Islam as a teenager: "*We recited a lot though. They are cultural practices because you only remember God when there is a difficulty that is afflicted on you.* (Aliyah, personal interview, July 19, 2011)

Early Islamic teachings and practices played an important role for all five participants. Religious upbringing make up a large part of individuals' childhood experiences, which influences how individuals grow up to perceive the world. Early on in life, Muslim children are socialized to perceive themselves as Muslims. The socialization first takes place in the home with the immediate family and possibly extended family, and then later on children may be sent to a Saturday Islamic school or to the mosque for Quran, Islamic or Arabic lessons. Islamic knowledge and practice is very often embedded in cultural traditions and every day practices and rituals in the home such as how to eat, how to dress, and how to speak to one another. Almost every interaction with others carries with it religious knowledge. In some cases, not practicing Islam can mean being excluded from the community. Having Islamic knowledge and performing Islamic duties means attaining respect and admiration for your family from the wider Muslim community.

As Aliyah shared, she learned to recite and memorize the Quran from a young age even though she didn't understand the meaning of the words or phrases. This practice has become so natural and embedded within the culture of Muslim families who are non-Arabic speakers, that it is no longer questioned or contested. Rather, it has become a symbol that is expected to be maintained and respected. Aliyah remembers the parties that were held in Montreal by

Pakistani-Muslim families when their children finished reading the Quran: "*You read the Quran once in your teens, so you can have a party afterwards*". (Aliyah, personal interview, July 19, 2011)

Reading the entire Quran in Arabic gives the family a sense of pride over their children's accomplishment and warrants for a large party to celebrate the accomplishment. As Aliyah grew older and yearned to learn more about her religion, she felt the need and necessity of reciting and memorizing the Quran with meaning rather than just as a cultural practice that is embedded in her Pakistani culture. Her focus began to move towards language learning for meaning rather than for cultural expectations, or as a cultural practice. She expressed a need to feel more Muslim than Pakistani:

> *Here people practice more than there* (Egypt). *Here we are more affiliated to our religion because we are a minority, and we need to stick to something.* (Aliyah, personal interview, July 19, 2011)

It is important for her to strengthen, construct, and create a distinction between her Muslim identity and her Pakistani identity. By learning to read the Quran in Arabic, and emphasizing the importance of reading the Quran with meaning, she is breaking away from the normalized cultural practice of learning to read the Quran in Arabic without meaning and understanding. Samira did not use Arabic at all in her childhood, so she couldn't understand the words of the Quran. However, she would listen to the recitation of the Quran when her grandparents would play a recording of it in the house. She said:

> *They would put it on for the blessing of the recitation. They would play it whenever, quite frequently.* (Samira, telephone interview, August 16, 2011)

At the age of twelve, she began to listen to the Quran on her own.

> *I would play the tape during Ramadan, because it was the month of Ramadan. That was all I could do, because I couldn't read [the Quran] myself.* (Samira, telephone interview, August 16, 2011)

She went on to reflect on this practice of listening to the recitation of the Quran, even though she didn't understand a word that was being said.

> *Logically speaking it should be something strange to do (to put on a language you don't understand and listen to it), but it is quite normal for all Muslims, even if they don't understand, to be awestruck by the recitation, and to feel something. It is quite incredible. I never thought it was strange, when I was doing it; I always had respect for it.* (Samira, telephone interview, August 16, 2011)

From early childhood Samira identified with the Arabic language and made it a part of her life. As she got older, it became important to her to find the meaning in the language in order to create the understanding she would need to fully appreciate the meaning of the Arabic recitation of the Quran.

Laila shared her experiences of being sent to Quran school in Somalia.

> *I grew up with the notion of Islam. I remember Surah Al Fatiha* [the first chapter of the Quran]*, until I forgot it.* (Laila, personal interview, August, 25, 2011)

After Laila left Somalia as a child, her family did not maintain their religious practices, which is why she forgot Surah Al Fatiha. She did not know why her parents did not continue to teach her Arabic, the Quran, or about her faith. However, this may have affected Laila's views of the Arabic language as more of a tool to gain knowledge about her faith, rather than as a tool to construct a religious identity.

Social and Environmental Issues While Studying Abroad

I was interested to know how the participants adjusted to Middle Eastern society and whether they felt it was challenging in any way to be in a foreign country.

Aliyah described her experience being a foreigner in Egypt:

> *In Cairo there are so many foreigners learning Arabic, there are so many institutes. Egyptians never make you feel like an outsider. They deal with outsiders all the time. I never felt like I was an outsider in Alexandria. Even if my husband is not Egyptian, they would strike a conversation. They are friendly people and they don't make you feel uncomfortable. I would definitely go back there to live, work, study.* (Aliyah, personal interview, July 19, 2011)

Amber, on the other hand, experienced culture shock when she was in Egypt. She stayed with her relatives who grew up in Sudan, but were living temporarily in Egypt. As she said, "*The cultures are very similar, there are differences, but it is very similar*" (Amber, personal interview, August 22, 2011). She explained how different Sudanese/Egyptian culture was from how she was raised in Canada. She stressed the socialization habits and practices as the main issue she had while living there. She said she was shocked with "*how much they visit each other*", and felt that "*the way they socialize is very demanding*" (Amber, personal interview, August 22, 2011).

B. J. Hall (2005) explained culture shock as

> a feeling of disorientation and discouragement due to the build-up of unmet expectations. The hundreds of expectations we have. . .about how people should act and how we should go about daily activities are often violated in many small and perhaps a few big ways. This creates an increasing sense of frustration. . .when we are in a new culture we

> are forced by differences in language and behaviours to maintain a heightened state of awareness. (pp. 272-273)

Obviously, Amber had idealistic expectations from her family in Egypt. She felt disequilibrium between her expectations and reality. She experienced a situation in which "previously familiar cues and scripts are suddenly inoperable" (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2005, p. 117). She also noticed other customs, such as

> *eating dinner on the floor* [and] *when you sit, you have to sit in a certain way, they would say it's rude, don't sit with your legs open, all these things that I didn't know. This is so complicated.* (Amber, personal interview, August 22, 2011)

When I asked her how she handled these new customs she was exposed to, she responded as follows:

> *I didn't try to resist it, I tried to fit in and go with the flow and respect it, because I am the foreigner.* (Amber, personal interview, August 22, 2011)

Berry (1997) explored the question of what happens to people who attempt to live in a different cultural setting than the one in which they previously lived in or grew up in. Some individuals adapt well to new cultural environments, such as was the case for Omar, Aliyah, Laila and Samira, while for others it may be difficult, such as what Amber experienced. Acculturation is used to describe the contact or encounter between two sets of cultural contexts (Berry, 1997), which in the case of my participants, was Canadian culture and Middle Eastern culture. Psychological acculturation (Graves, 1969) describes the psychological changes that occur in an individual when they are in a new cultural context. This can include changes in the individual's attitudes, values, and goals (Berry, 1997). Cultural and ethnic identities may shift

and change as a result of interacting with a new culture, and behaviours such as lifestyle habits and attitude may change during acculturation (Berry, 1997).

Amber was surprised with what she observed while living with her family in Egypt. As she said:

> *Going to Egypt, made me feel confused. . .I felt idealistic about it and I had a reality shock. . .the women gossip a lot. . .hypocrisy and social obligations were issues. For me it was really hard. . .people don't progress* [in Egypt]. *They are a prison of their own world, a prisoner of their customs. People are not ambitious, what's the point; we are going to earn peanuts anyways. I felt like I was in conflict with a lot of their values.* (Amber, personal interview, August 22, 2011)

Amber may have lived through this experience and related it to her self-identity as a woman and a Canadian. Research has suggested that women, specifically, struggle to find belonging in other cultures and languages, if their subjective gender clashes with who they believe themselves to be or who they wish to be (C. Higgins, 2011). Growing up as a Canadian, Amber broke free from the gendered expectations that are present in Arab society, such as how to act around guests, how to sit (properly), and how to eat.

I asked her if she feels she would have had a different experience if she had lived in Egypt by herself or with other students, rather than with family members. She thought that it would have made a huge difference.

> *Maybe, I would have been less exposed to the negative things in the culture. The environment really affected the experience. Going abroad, there is the honeymoon phase, and then reality hits. It wasn't the best experience of my life. I am glad, I learned a lot and I should benefit people from what I learned. But in terms of spiritual uplifting,*

nothing. I don't want to lose it [Arabic]; *it was a year of my life I took off from school.* (Amber, personal interview, August 22, 2011)

For Amber learning a language meant embodying an entire cultural identity. She had a preconception in her mind of what the cultural identity of Arabs or Muslims should have been and that was not what she experienced. This disconnection between what she thought and what she experienced caused her anxiety and made her experience less than pleasant. Amber felt that the Muslim people she met in Egypt would have a high sense of morality and goodness, as is prescribed within the Islamic faith. When she found that Muslims were not all like that, she felt disappointed and disillusioned. However, she didn't feel that her entire experience was negative. She did have a positive experience with her teachers in Egypt.

They were dedicated, hard-working, and competent individuals. (Amber, personal interview, August 22, 2011)

She wanted to make it clear that:

My experience is only limited to my own family members and does not reflect how the whole society is in general. (Amber, personal interview, August 22, 2011)

Although Amber experienced discomfort being in a new culture, she was able to accept that there were positive aspects that she could adopt and apply in her own life.

Laila related her experiences in Egypt to her experiences as a minority, being ethnically Somalian and a visible Muslim woman who wears the veil in Canada.

Being a minority here and a minority in Egypt: I was okay with being in Egypt, I blended in with everyone. Like the way I dressed and my skin color, if I didn't look Egyptian to them, I looked Sudanese, which is an Egyptian anyways. I never stood out. They never

> *assumed we were North Americans, that's for sure.* (Laila, personal interview, August, 25, 2011)

Laila felt a sense of comfort because she blended into Egyptian society. This was a contrast to her experiences growing up a Somalian-Muslim in Ontario, where she stood out from the rest of her peers. Although she is not Egyptian, Egyptians in Egypt thought she was, which suggests that Laila feels more comfortable in an environment where she can identify with those around her and where she does not feel like a minority. For once in her life, she was not made to feel like the Other; her identity as a Muslim woman was not being challenged, questioned, or contested.

Laila's positive experiences within Egyptian society allowed her to adapt well in Egypt, as well as adopt cultural and religious practices that she observed. When asked about what she had taken away from her experiences in Egypt she said:

> *The best parts of Arab culture are those that are validated through the religion so in terms of the amount of attention that Arabs give to their guests, is something that I have tried to apply. Arab hospitality that is something that really impressed us. I try to do myself.* (Laila, personal interview, August 25, 2011)

Omar, like Laila, was especially warmed by the hospitality that the Syrians showed him and his other foreign friends. He said:

> *When I got to know the locals, they were always very welcoming; they treated me and my British friend like their own kids. The families there do it up on Eid, they would always serve us first, put us in the front row. They would tell us, it was a pleasure having you come here.* (Omar, personal interview, July 14, 2011)

Samira made some observations about Syrian society, in general, and how it was different from North America.

> *It's more homogenous than Canada. We are multicultural here. It's not like that in most other countries that you go to, and I think there is a mentality that goes with the cosmopolitan culture here. I never felt that anyone was looking funny at me. . .whereas in a culture like Syria where their identity is more defined as one entity, there is a meaning attached to certain ways of dressing. There is a particular standard associated with dressing, for example, colourful hijabs were unusual, wasn't what the conservative people would wear. I wasn't aware of that kind of distinction. In Canada whatever you wear it's hard to prescribe a particular meaning to it. I can't guess what a person's intention or background is. In Syria, there is a certain way of dressing. Pants were unusual at that time, now it's changed. I looked like a tourist at the beginning for sure.*
>
> (Samira, telephone interview, August 16, 2011)

Samira was very insightful and reflective about what she saw in Syrian society. She noticed how the way people dress and behave say something about how they wish to be identified or treated. Women in Syria, even if they don't wear the veil, still dress conservatively, with loose clothing and long pants and tops because society in general is used to seeing women covered. If people see a women who is not covered according to cultural expectations, they may think bad things about her or feel that she wants attention from men. Samira observed that there is an intentional way that people in Syria dress and it reflects their values and customs.

Globalization plays a large part in identity construction. Arnett (2002) argued that people today are developing both a local and global identity and are creating "a sense of belonging to a worldwide culture" (p. 32). While studying in Syria, Samira expressed that she began to dress

very similarly to how Syrian women dress. Laila did the same in Egypt, dressing more Egyptian. They had direct access to other cultures and felt like they belonged there. As people adapt to their local environment and adjust their lives to local customs and ways of life, they also have access to a global culture through technology. They are able to communicate with people in all parts of the world and learn about their way of life. Young people today are growing up with a "global consciousness" (Arnett, 2002, p. 777). According to Giddens (1991), children and adolescents have “phenomenal worlds [that are] for the most part truly global” (p. 187). Robertson (1992) argued that children today gradually develop “the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” (p. 8). What this means to identity construction is that people are creating both a local identity as well as a global identity, thus forming hybrid identities. Their global identity makes them feel a sense of belonging to a wider global culture (Arnett, 2002). This global identity may be manifested in manners of behaviour, dress, language, music, dance and so forth. Globalization has changed traditional ways of living, and identity “has to be created and recreated on a more active basis than before” (Giddens, 2000, p. 65). The diverse identity choices that individuals are now faced with makes the process of identity construction ever more multifaceted and complex. Giddens (1991) also stated that, "the reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices" (pp. 38–9). My participants experienced a different culture and as a result adopted some of the behaviors and values that they felt coincided with the way they wanted to live their lives. They were able to witness various ways of acting, speaking, dressing, and being. In short, through their experiences studying Arabic abroad, they changed and adapted their behaviors.

Samira explained how she dealt with the heterogeneity of Syrian culture by adopting their way of dress. She compared it to an earlier experience she had traveling to Malaysia, where she also adopted their way of dressing soon after arriving in the country.

> *Very early, I adopted their way of dress - I started dressing like a Malaysian. It wasn't problematic. I didn't want to feel like a tourist or a consumer in a culture, I wanted to take part in it, and gain that experience. It's always been like that. You want to be there, so join in fully. A good traveller picks up some words in the language, to be a part of that, and for me it stretched into clothing.* (Samira, telephone interview, August 16, 2011)

Interestingly, Samira experienced reverse culture shock when she returned to Canada from Egypt, unlike Amber, who experienced culture shock travelling to Egypt. As she said:

> *I felt a shift in identity and how you see yourself. You absorb a lot of the culture. When I came back* [to Canada] *I had reverse culture shock. I had no culture shock when I was there. People were kind and hospitable. I felt delighted with their warmth. I felt like it was a great contrast to what I had known here - that warmth of complete strangers.* (Samira, telephone interview, August 16, 2011)

Each participant observed different cultural norms and values, and related, identified, or connected with them in different ways. Some chose to adopt them and try to fit in as much as they could, while others could not reconcile the differences between their own culture and that of the culture they were immersed in during their studies abroad. As Taylor (2003) wrote in relation to identity, place, and belonging, "the particular way that a place is characterized by a speaker carries implications for the identity of a person who claims to be of or not of that place, or, in other words, to be the kind of person who belongs there or the kind who does not" (p. 201).

Maguire and Graves (2001) spoke of the “presentation of self”, which describes the ways individuals "intentionally signal their identity and interactional positioning of the self" (p. 568). They (2001) focused on "discourse choices" (p. 570) of children and the complex ways children act in their world, such as the way they present themselves to others. Maguire and Graves (2001) described language learning and identity construction as a "simultaneous, recursive, creative process of interpretation, participation, representation and self-evaluation (p. 589). It is evident that some participants felt a sense of belonging when they studied abroad; thus, they noticed a shift in identity within themselves. Others struggled with belonging and therefore did not experience or view any shift in their identity, but rather held fast to their self-identity.

Armour (2001) wrote about identity slippage. Identity slippage refers to how one’s cultural identity shifts as a result of learning a second language. Identity slippage was shown in Armour’s study of Anglo-Australians who studied in Japan. He found that the participants were able to shift their identities and redefine themselves as more Japanese than Australian due to the sense of belonging they felt in Japan. One possible result of study abroad and intercultural communication is the intercultural awareness and the importance of finding a third space (Bhabha, 1994). Intercultural awareness is the ability to compare and internalize one's personal values, beliefs, and behaviours, and "to develop the ability to see one's own culture from the perspective of an outsider" (C. Higgins, 2011, p. 15). When language learners are able to develop intercultural awareness they are able to dwell in a third space. This is a space where they can detach themselves from both their "home" culture and their "target" culture (C. Higgins, 2011). Students who studied language abroad have shown an ability to disconnect themselves from their cultures and to identify as global citizens (Kramsch, 2009), and to feel more at ease with others who also identify as intercultural (C. Higgins, 2011). Roland Robertson and Habib

Haque Khondker (1998) took an interesting perspective on how intercultural identification relates to globalization. They described globalization as a process that "involves the compression of the entire world, on the one hand, and a rapid increase in consciousness of the whole world, on the other" (p. 29). The five participants in my inquiry are not from the Middle East and did not grow up knowing how to speak or read in Arabic. They travelled to Egypt and Syria where the culture was very different from the ones they were accustomed to (e.g., Canadian, Somalian, Pakistani). Through their study abroad experiences, they were able to develop an intercultural awareness and compare their own culture(s) to the new one they were discovering. By adopting new ways of dressing, communicating, and behaving they found a 'third space' in which to belong. This was a space that was not entirely Canadian, Somalian, or Pakistani, but rather a space that rested in between the culture they had grown up with and the culture they were discovering in Egypt and Syria. This 'third space' also included a religious identity that was not entirely based on what they had been taught to believe as children and not entirely adopted from their religious encounters in Egypt and Syria. Each participant created a place for themselves where they were comfortable practicing Islam.

Language Learning and Identity Construction

Participants stated three main benefits of having travelled abroad to study Arabic as a second language. Four out of five participants explained that the biggest benefit was that knowing Arabic gave them more opportunity to learn about their religion and understand it at a deeper level; in turn this increased their level of spirituality. Amber, who experienced culture shock while studying Arabic in Egypt, did not feel an increase in her spirituality as a result of learning Arabic or studying in Egypt. The second benefit that some participants pointed out was that they felt more comfortable communicating with other Arabic speakers, and that it gave them

the opportunity to create relationships with people they wouldn't have otherwise been able to talk to. The third benefit was that some participants felt that what they learned while living in another society was different from the one they were accustomed to. They stated that they learned different behaviors and ways of being from people in Syria and Egypt, and that they learned to be humble and grateful after seeing people who were less fortunate than them.

Laila felt that knowing Arabic strengthened her understanding of her faith.

> *It made me understand my religion much more, it has deepened. It has given an extreme new dimension of the Quran, and how aware I am of praying and fasting. Where before you would just do things kind of fine, but not doing it with the awareness of the details.* (Laila, personal interview, August, 25, 2011)

She also said that learning Arabic gave her access to texts she didn't have access to before. Reading about "*Islamic history and reading from Arabic Islamic texts that have stayed the same, it connects you with the history"* (Laila, personal interview, August, 25, 2011).

She gave an example of how she was reading a Hadeeth (a saying of the Prophet Mohammed, p.b.u.h.):

> *I could understand it. . .and I realized that these are the exact words that the Prophet said thousands of years ago. It gave me a connection and a realization that I would never have been able to appreciate.* (Laila, personal interview, August, 25, 2011)

Through language, Laila was able to feel a connection between past and present. The words spoken thousands of years ago had an impact on her present life. Language allowed her to connect to a time and place she was never a part of.

Omar's faith and understanding of his religion were also deeply affected by his experiences in Syria. Omar said that after studying Arabic in Syria, he came back being more *himself*, and that the experience opened him up to new ideas.

> *Over there I felt more at peace, over here I felt it was a burden, because here you always have conflicting conflicts with yourself. You go to school and grow up in an environment where you have girlfriends or do drugs, and all of a sudden you go cold turkey.* (Omar, personal interview, July 15, 2011)

In this excerpt Omar was talking about when he first began to practice Islam in Canada and the conflicts between home and school values that many young Muslims struggle with. He explained the conflicting roles and values that he had to deal with:

> *Everything I did prior to going to Syria, I had to question myself. . .I had a conflict within myself. I felt when I went there it became easy; I wasn't questioning myself when I did things. I would put more trust in Allah. Before [going to Syria], I had a tendency to judge things myself and after [going to Syria], I didn't. I would just leave things for God.* (Omar, personal interview, July 5, 2011)

Before traveling to Syria and being exposed to new ideas and different opinions within Islamic thought and practice, Omar felt that he had to decide and judge for himself what was right and what was wrong. He was very hard on himself and he wanted to do everything "right" from the beginning. He talked about the friends that he was surrounded by when he first began to practice Islam, and described them as being very harsh and critical. He said that with those Muslims, you were either all or nothing, and that was an opinion that he was not comfortable with. He also talked about how going to Syria made him more open to questioning various ideas and notions in Islam.

> *It made me more inquisitive. Before going, there was no need to question, you are told something and that is the way it is. Someone hits you with a Hadeeth and bang there you go, it is black and whit*e. (Omar, personal interview, July 15, 2011)

After having studied in Syria, Omar now feels more fulfilled in his religious duties and practice such as prayer.

> *When I take the time to really pray it is more fulfilling. I am concentrating and understanding what I am saying and trying to pronounce the words right*. (Omar, personal interview, July 15, 2011)

In this excerpt, I see a connection to Skinner, Holland, and Pach's (1998) description of how people are agents in their lives who use resources, such as personal history and social conditions to remake themselves and gain a sense of who they are. Through agency and action, people are constantly involved in a process of creating a sense of themselves through socio-historical and cultural worlds. In this view, people are no longer viewed as "passive receptors or transmitters of cultural meanings and relationships" (p. 95), but rather as "actively (re)producing cultural meanings and social structures with others in the context of specific activities" (p. 95). Omar became an agent in his own life. After learning Arabic he was able to understand the words that he was reciting during his prayers, which gave him a sense of fulfillment and self satisfaction in the religious rituals that he practiced. He also realized his ability to question certain religious beliefs and practices, rather than take for granted that "*that is the way it is*" (Omar, personal interview, July 15, 2011). He took an active role in his own learning: He traveled to Syria at the young age of 18 and began a journey to learn a language that would give him the access he needed in order to search for the religious knowledge he was seeking. By taking action Omar acted as an agent in his own life.

Samira had similar experiences in that learning Arabic helped her have access to texts and gain a better understanding of her religion. Although she explained that learning Arabic does not necessarily mean she understands everything that is written in the Quran, she talked about the many meanings and layers of meaning present in the Quran that would require a deep level of knowledge of Arabic and Islam.

> *I can enjoy reading Quran. It is an enjoyable experience for me. It may not have been if I were struggling with every word. . . . I am able to enjoy the sweetness in the poetic language of the Quran. Arabic gives me access to that, and it gives me great pleasure when I understand the beauty of the choice of words.* (Samira, telephone interview, August 16, 2011)

Samira here is focusing on the choice of words used in the Quran, and her appreciation of this after learning Arabic. Language learning is not only about connecting to a community and interacting with others, but also about learning the intricate details of why a word is used over another and what meaning this has to the text as a whole. Knowledge of the text gave Samira an appreciation for the different ways meaning can be displayed through language.

Samira also recognized the benefit of learning Arabic as a means to connect to her husband's family and to the larger Arab community.

> *Socially. . .my husband is Arab. It may not have happened if I didn't speak Arabic. I am able to speak to his family. That is really valuable for the both of us to have that connection. . . .I have been able to take part in the community that I wouldn't be able to take part in if I weren't able to speak that language.* (Samira, telephone interview, August 16, 2011)

This excerpt connects to what Norton (1995) wrote about how when language learners interact with target language speakers, they are participating in the process of "organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world" (p. 18). Therefore, an investment in the target language can also be acknowledged as an investment in one's own social identity (Norton, 1995). Ricento (2005) explained that when people learn a new language they go through a process of "transformation rather than one of replacement" (p. 904). This means that the outcome of language learning is an identity that is not a part of either culture, but rather of a negotiation among cultures inclusively, which takes place in a "third space" (Bhabba, 1994).

The participants were encouraged to reflect on the cultural norms and values that they observed while studying in Egypt and Syria. As Aliyah noted:

> *You come back with a different way of looking at things when you come back to Montreal. Where we live here is so tiny. We live in such a bigger place from where we are on this small island. There is a really big world out there. We are more grateful we see so many people in difficult circumstances. They* [Egyptians] *can barely afford food, but they are so happy and content. I know that Egyptians don't eat meat every day. That was what my teacher was telling me and I was shocked. Here we eat meat every day. We eat basically whatever we want every day. We come back being grateful for what we have.* (Aliyah, personal interview, July 19, 2011)

Many border crossers will not see the changes or differences within themselves until they have returned home. When Aliyah, Samira, and Laila returned home, they reflected on their experiences abroad and chose to incorporate some of the culture or values they observed. They

also missed the cultural practices they became a part of and accepted as a way of life abroad and even found it difficult to go back to their lives before travelling.

Samira, for example, felt that she changed as a result of the cultural norms she experienced and adopted as a part of her lifestyle after studying in Syria. She noticed the kindness and trust that is evident in Syrian society and recognized that those values and behaviours may not be able to be transferred to Canadian society.

> *I changed; the experience is bound to change someone. I came away from that experience with a lot of hope and I enjoyed being there and seeing the culture and sincerity of people. I tried to incorporate that in what gave meaning to my own life and how I see myself and my relations with people. I found their* [*Syrians'*] *relations with people to be warm and contributed a lot to the daily life. There are limits in how one can incorporate that in a different society, like here. . . .There was a great deal of trust among people and strangers in Syria, but here there are limits, and if the society is not used to that, you can't do that here.* (Samira, telephone interview, August 16, 2011)

As Samira experienced, for many language learners abroad, their identity reconstruction may not be apparent to them until they return home and miss the 'other' way of life. They may even see the world differently and "long for the practices (e.g., linguistic and cultural) and values that they had come to accept while abroad" (Jackson, 2008, p. 55). Language learners are "social beings" who are "embodied, semiotic and emotional persons who identify themselves, resist identifications, and act on their social worlds (Norton & Toohey, 2002, p. 123). Samira noticed that in Syria there was more trust among people, for example she could stop and talk to a shop owner in a Syrian market as if he was an 'uncle', whereas in Canada she feels she has to pay more attention to who she talks to as they may interpret her interaction with them in the wrong way.

Aliyah was able to appreciate the blessings she has living here in Canada. She noticed that people in Egypt didn't eat meat as a part of their regular diet because they simply couldn't afford to. This gave her a look into certain privileges she may have taken for granted before traveling to Egypt.

Summary

Through the five participants' self-reported perceived experiences, complex and oftentimes challenging relationships among culture, identity, and language learning emerged. The themes that emerged during my analysis are social investment in language learning, spirituality, possible selves, and belonging. The participants also discussed their early language experiences with Arabic; environmental or social issues that arose while studying Arabic in Egypt and Syria; how they felt their language learning experiences have impacted how they view themselves as Muslims; and how they actively construct their religious identities as Muslims while living in Canada. Through their stories, they revealed how their identities are changing and they described challenges in adapting to a new culture overseas, and re-adapting upon returning to Canada. It is important to see language learners as social beings who, through the process of interaction with others and their environment, maintain and construct a sense of who they are and how they want to be viewed by others. In the next and final chapter, I explain my own integrative understandings of this inquiry, and suggest possible future research in the area of Muslim identity and second language learning.

Chapter 6: Reflective Understandings

Introduction

In this chapter, I reflect on the construction of the identities of the five Muslim Canadian participants who studied Arabic as a second language in a study abroad context. First and foremost, the data showed that the participants construct their identities through their relationships to the Islamic faith. By learning Classical Arabic, they believe that they are better able to understand the meaning of the Quran, and in turn use that knowledge to better themselves as Muslims spiritually, intellectually, and through religious practice. In this chapter, I draw on the data from my inquiry to argue that Muslim Canadians are actively and individually constructing their identities; their identities are not a result of tradition or values that are passed down from previous generations, but rather situated in context, space, and time. I then discuss implications of this inquiry for key stakeholders, such as parents, educators and academic institutions, in relation to the increasingly hostile environment that Muslims are facing in the West. I suggest ways stakeholders can assist Muslim Canadians in facing their challenges. I conclude with suggestions for future research.

Implications of the Inquiry

Muslims have been under scrutiny for a long time, especially after the tragic events of 9/11. As Fred Halliday (2002) wrote:

> The crises unleashed by the events of 11 September is one that is global and all-encompassing. It is global in the sense that it binds many different countries into conflict, most obviously the USA and parts of the Muslim world. It is all-encompassing in that more than any other international crises yet seen, it affects a multiplicity of life's levels, political, economic, cultural and psychological. (p. 31)

In the aftermath of 9/11, Muslims around the world have increasingly become "the victims of discrimination, harassment, racial and religious profiling, and verbal and physical assault" (Peek, 2003, p. 271). A better understanding of Muslim religious practices and beliefs can help shed light on this heterogenous albeit misunderstood and misrepresented group.

In Quebec, Parti Québécois leader, Pauline Marois, has proposed a Charter of Values (Bill 60), which would ban individuals from wearing religious symbols, such as the veil, kippah, and turban in government offices. Effectively, the Charter would leave many people who choose to visibly identify themselves with their religion having to choose between their religious rights and their right to work and provide for themselves and their families. I feel that due to this ban, even if it does not pass, many people will choose to leave Quebec because the living conditions in Quebec have become intolerable to Muslims, especially for women who wear the veil.

In Quebec, there have been cases of harassment by people who agree with the Charter of Values. Those who are against the ban, believe it to be an attack on peoples' religious freedoms in Canada and Quebec. The organization L'R des centres des femmes du Quebec, which fights for women who are being discriminated against, have heard many incidences of harassment towards Muslim women who wear the veil since the Charter was first proposed (Wilton & Dougherty, 2013). For instance, Fariha Naqvi-Mohamed blogged about her experience taking her kids to the movie theatre and being called a "F'ing Terrorist" (Naqvi-Mohamed, 2013). L'R des centres des femmes du Quebec released a statement, saying "women are being shoved, insulted, denigrated. Some have even been spit on in the face. The impacts of the debate over the charter are undeniable" (Hamilton, 2013). There has also been opposition to Bill 60 from other rights groups, as well as individuals. The Montreal's Jewish General Hospital, for example, took a brave stance against what they call a discriminatory bill. Dr. Lawrence

Rosenberg, the director of the hospital, stated that the hospital will simply ignore the law all together and if the province wants to take them to court, than that is their choice (Perreaux, 2013).

As I discussed in Chapter 2, there are around 1.57 billion Muslims in the world, making up about 22% of the world population (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2010). In Canada, there are a little over one million Muslims, with approximately 240,000 living in Quebec (Statistics Canada, 2011). Thus, Bill 60 would affect Muslim women who wear the veil by increasing incidences of harassment towards them, and limiting their opportunities for education and career choices. Muslim women and other visible minorities would have to choose between their religious dress and their work or education. Even though the ban on religious symbols would only affect employees in government offices such as hospitals, schools, and government daycares, women who are simply walking on the street and conducting their every day errands are being targeted by hate and intolerance. Already facing intolerance and discrimination due to their religious beliefs, a charter such as this would give people permission to be visibly and outwardly insufferable towards Muslim women who choose to wear the veil. As a Muslim woman who works, studies, and raises her children in Quebec all while wearing my veil, I am both saddened and disgusted by the proposed Charter and the consequences it has already had for Quebec society. I am constantly wondering if I will be the next women who will be attacked by hateful stares or words while I am doing my grocery shopping with my children beside me. As a mother, I am not sure how I would explain such a hateful encounter to my children, if they were to witness such spite and malice. As any mother would feel, my main concern is to protect my children from ugliness in this world; however, it is difficult to do so when discrimination is happening right in my own backyard.

Implications for Stakeholders

In this section, I explore the implications of this inquiry for educators, parents and academic institutions. Stakeholders can play a large part in forming, shaping, and motivating learners. Recognizing the important role these stakeholders play in the learning process of second language learners can greatly increase the success of these students. This inquiry can aid in increasing understanding towards Muslims especially, but also of individuals from all backgrounds.

Educators.

Educators play a large role in the lives of young people, and as such, they need to keep themselves informed about the concerns and challenges Muslim families have in Canada. Creating classrooms that promote equality, justice, and respect for everyone, despite differences, is critical in Canada's multicultural society. Even more crucial in Quebec, is the need to have discussions about freedoms such as linguistic freedom, and now in 2013, religious freedom. This points to some important implications for teaching young people how to critically look at the messages mass media are sending out about other cultures, nations, and societies, so that young people are able to decide for themselves what is accurate and inaccurate information.

Educators can choose texts for class assignments that educate students about other cultures and ways of being. Some good examples are: *Does My Head Look Big in This?* written by Randa Abdel-Fattah (2008). It follows the story of a Palestinian-Australian sixteen year old girl named Amal who decides to start wearing the veil. *Serafina's Promise* written by Ann E. Burg (2013) is another great story about a young girl growing up in Haiti. And *My Basmati Bat Mitzvah* by Paula J. Freedman (2013), follows the story of a young girl who is negotiating her Indian and Jewish identities.

Books can open doors into the lives of others. Becoming aware of differences and similarities may help us celebrate the diversity present in the world. Children in Canada are growing up in a diverse society, and opening them up to books about other cultures helps them to appreciate the cultures that surround them. Through knowledge of one another we can learn to respect one another, and not view difference in a negative way. We may also come to realize how much we have to learn from one another's experiences and knowledge. Teaching children about diversity will help them appreciate difference rather than fear it.

Pertaining to language and Muslims, educators should also consider that a lot of Muslim children, whether they are Arab or not, attend an Arabic language school, Quran class, or Islamic school on the weekends. Among Quebec's immigrant population, Arabic was of the top three languages spoken at home, besides Spanish and Italian (Statistics Canada, 2011). This means that many children of immigrant parents are exposed to a third language at home. When teachers are aware of their students' home routines and experiences, they are better able to respond to the needs of their students. Children who do not speak French (the majority language of education in Quebec) as a first language at home may need some extra language support in their learning. When language teachers grade their students' language skills, it is important that they keep in mind whether it is the child's first, second, or third language and possibly help the child in the language areas they are finding challenging.

Educators should also be aware of social differences between school life and home life for young Muslims. Often the values taught at school are different than the ones taught at home, and these differences may make it difficult for some Muslim children to adjust and integrate into the classroom or relate to their peers. For example, some Muslim children are not allowed to socialize outside of school hours with their friends, since their parents may fear that their

children will be influenced by their friends' lifestyles. Therefore, teachers can be sensitive to those students who may feel left out of social gatherings or certain experiences their peers get to have. The clash in values may cause confusion for young Muslims and possibly stress either at school or at home or both.

Schools face challenges in regulating behavior that occurs outside of school hours between peers and classmates; therefore, reaching out to parents through email or workshops may help in this area. Young people from all races, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds are susceptible to being bullied, and Muslims are no exception. Schools could hold workshops for parents, informing them about cyber-bullying, and how to protect their children against online predators. According to a 2010 survey conducted by the Washington-based advocacy group Muslim Mothers Against Violence, all 57 Muslim respondents, aged 11 to 18, reported being harassed for being Muslim. Eighty percent reported being called a 'terrorist' (Sacirbey, 2011).

Sadly, many young victims try to, or are successful in ending their lives because they cannot cope with the harassment, hatred, and bullying directed at them. Amanda Todd, a Vancouver teen committed suicide after extensive online and in school bullying (Grenoble, 2012). Todd Loik, committed suicide only days before his sixteenth birthday in his family home in Saskatchewan. He was also being bullied online and in school (Purdy, 2013). These are only two very tragic cases of the consequences of bullying.

One possible reason why Muslims may be targets of bullying is due to being perceived by the public as having a singular essentialized identity, which takes away an individual's uniqueness. Although Muslims can usually be identified through their manner of dressing, for example the veil for women, or a long beard and robe for men, Muslims are not a homogenous group and teachers can teach multiculturalism and diversity even within the same culture as a

part of their curriculum. Halliday (1999) explained that "Islam tells us only one part of how these people live and see the world" (p. 897). Tariq Modood (2003) tried to clarify the diversity found within the Muslim religious group:

> Some Muslims are devout but apolitical; some are political but do not see their politics as being 'Islamic'. Some identify more with a nationality of origin, such as Turkish; others with the nationality of settlement and perhaps citizenship, such as French. Some prioritise fundraising for mosques, other campaign against discrimination, unemployment or Zionism. . . The category 'Muslim', then, is as internally diverse as 'Christian' or 'Belgian' or 'middle-class'. (p. 100)

When teachers engage in critical reflection, this can elicit a meaningful understanding of the processes of teaching and learning. Critical reflection involves "posing questions about how and why things are the way they are, what value systems they represent, what alternatives might be available, and what the limitations are of doing things one way as opposed to another" (Lockhart, 1996, p. 4). Teachers can, for example, keep teaching journals or record a part of a lesson so that they can later reflect on their teaching practices and their students' learning.

Parents.

Growing up, my sister and I would have benefited from going to an Arabic school on the weekends. A heritage language school would have been valuable for teaching us the written form of Arabic and it would have given us the opportunity to socialize with other Arabic speaking children. Muslim parents who want their children to be able to identify as Muslim should provide a lot of opportunities for their children to socialize with other Muslims. In my opinion, children would benefit from being around others who share their general beliefs and values. Parents should also take into consideration the different social groups their children are affiliated

with. Their children are associating with a diverse group of individuals at school, sports activities, and possibly a part time job. Teaching them to respect the diversity of others will help their children integrate into and cope with a diverse multicultural society. Young people are also constantly negotiating who they want to be and how they want to live. They may benefit from having a little space from their parents to discover who they are in this changing world. Parents can explain their family and cultural traditions, customs, and values, but should not impose them onto their children. Children growing up in Canada are living in a very different world than their immigrant parents did.

As this inquiry found, children who read or memorize the Quran without understanding what they are reading do not feel that the practice is completely beneficial. My participants stated that at the time, they did what their parents wanted them to do, which was read the Quran in Arabic or memorize it, but they lacked motivation because they did not understand the meanings. As Samira stated, as a child she would listen to the Quran in Arabic and she would feel a sense of comfort and peace from doing so; however, as she got older, she had many questions about what God was really saying to her through the Quran. She wanted to understand this for herself and this led her to learn Arabic, the language of the Quran.

Parents who are aware of the importance of Arabic for the identity construction of Muslims can aid and facilitate their children's language learning from a young age. Rather than having children only read the Quran in Arabic, it would be beneficial to also teach the meanings of the Arabic words and to expose young children to early Arabic language literacy skills. For parents who know Arabic themselves, this won't be too difficult; but for parents who don't know Arabic themselves, there are many resources available online and in the community. For example, there are private tutors or Arabic language classes on the weekends. There are also

many resources online that teach children (and adults) Arabic from beginner levels and up. Resources on Islamic values, such as Ali Baba videos, can be found on YouTube or purchased on DVD. Islamic and Arabic songs and stories can be found free online or to purchase. In Montreal, there is an Islamic bookstore called Alexandria in Ville St-Laurent. This store has an immense selection of Islamic books in French, English, and Arabic. There are also Arabic language learning curricula for children of all ages.

Academic institutions.

This inquiry has highlighted the important role that Arabic plays for the identity constructions of Muslims living in Canada. Academic institutions, such as language institutes and universities, would be doing a great justice if administrators and educators understood the role that language plays in the lives of Muslims and provided Arabic classes that suited their needs. Language classes that focus on Classical Arabic would be valuable for Muslims who wish to learn Arabic in order to connect to their faith more, similar to the participants in this present study. It is also important to hire teachers who are qualified Arabic teachers, and not just Arabic speaking individuals. Many language courses have teachers who simply know the language being taught, but are not trained as teachers. Providing a variety of language learning materials is also important. Online resources can be a great asset to language learners. Some websites that aid in Arabic language learning are: Arabic Pod (www.arabicpod.net), which has multimedia lessons and tools for learning Arabic, and Aswaat Arabiyya (www.laits.utexas.edu/aswaat/), which provides Arabic listening material. Learning Arabic through the context of Arabic culture can help learners understand how the language is used within the Arabic speaking communities. For example, including Arabic music into a language lesson would be fun for language learners and expose them to different styles of Arabic music as

well as different dialects of Arabic. Listening to the news in Arabic on Al Jazeera (www.aljazeera.net) can give students a view into the political and social lives of Arabs living in the Middle East. Al Majalla (www.majalla.com/ar/) is an online magazine that covers politics, culture, current events, and cultural affairs. Listening to the news is a great way to expose students to Modern Standard Arabic, and dramas or movies offer great examples of natural communication to second language learners. Providing learning materials that are fun and interesting can motivate students in their language learning endeavors. For example Sayidaty (www.sayidaty.net/) is an Arab women's magazine that covers topics such as beauty, fashion, health, music, art, cuisine, and celebrity news.

Academic institutions can benefit students of Arab and Muslim backgrounds by incorporating curricula that shed light on the variety of beliefs and practices of Muslims worldwide. My participants travelled to the Middle East in order to learn Arabic, in part because they could not find an institution in Canada that fit their needs. They were looking for a class that was taught by qualified language teachers, rather than just Arabic speaking individuals. All of my participants agreed that the experience of traveling to another country to learn a language was invaluable and they believe that they learned more there than they would have in any language class here in Canada. However, for those individuals who are not able to travel overseas due to lack of funds, time or opportunity, an Arabic language class that is motivating and interesting can be a valuable alternative.

Future Research

Although there is research in the area of Muslims living in the United States and Europe, the same is not true for those living in Canada. For example, in “Muslims on the Americanization Path?”, Yvonne Haddad (2000) wrote about the experiences of Muslims who

immigrated to Europe and North America and the challenges they have in forming their identity and helping their children negotiate their identities. She wrote that:

> [T]he quest for a relevant Muslim identity is part of the American experience, as each generation of immigrants has brought a certain sense of self which appears to undergo constant revision and redefinition in the context of the American melting (boiling?) pot. (Haddad, 2000, p. 22)

Mohammed Khan (2000) discussed the identity politics of Muslims in America. He believed that "identity connects the individual to the collective; it establishes relations whose nature is political and which is known as identity politics" (p. 88). He also explained that "through the shaping and reshaping of the 'I' and the 'we' the individual and the community shape and re-shape each other" (p. 88). Abu Laban (1991) wrote about the importance of family and religion in the lives of Muslim immigrants to North America and how these values and beliefs are passed down (or not) to future generations of Muslims. Barazangi (1991) talked about how "some Arab and Muslim youth and families in North America perceive themselves both as Arabs and as Muslims in the context of Canadian and United States societies" (p. 132). These are all important contributions to our understandings of Muslims in North America.

As this inquiry showed, Muslims living in Canada use the Arabic language in their daily lives. They also use it to construct and maintain their religious identities. Seeing the relevance that Arabic has to the lives of Muslims in Canada, it would be beneficial for this marginalized community to have access to appropriate language classes, or institutions that teach different forms of Arabic such as Classical Arabic or a dialect, by qualified language teachers.

It would be beneficial to further examine the many different ways Muslims are actively constructing and maintaining their religious, cultural, linguistic, ethnic and national identities. It

would be interesting, for example, to examine the way Muslim individuals negotiate their various identities, and how they adapt their religious culture to the culture in Canada. Reasons why some Muslims do not integrate easily into Western culture could also be examined, and suggestions for educators and parents to help them ease their integration could be suggested. Researching Muslim identity is important because it contributes to our knowledge and brings awareness to the diversity of Muslim identities, as well as the variety of ways Muslims construct their own individual unique identities. There are direct links between the "stereotypes and monolithic portrayals of Arabs/Muslims and the presence of racism and Islamophobia" (Hamdon, 2010, p. 16). These images also often "fail to acknowledge the contextual and contested nature of Muslim identities (Hamdon, 2010, p. 16). Stereotypes of Muslims are a result of the "underlying belief" that Muslims have one single identity (Hamdon, 2010, p. 16), rather than the diversity of cultures, language, beliefs, and ideologies which exist within the Islamic faith. It is imperative, especially in today's political climate, for Muslim identities to be represented as versatile, adaptable, flexible, evolving, and contextual.

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