THE FORMATION OF MUSLIM IDENTITIES IN CANADIAN OFFLINE AND ONLINE SPACES

by

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Abstract

This study examines how Muslims who live in three Canadian cities have described and framed their religious identities. It has three foci: First, how religiously pluralist offline spaces shape the Islamic legal tradition preferences of the fifty-five self-defined Muslims I interviewed in Mississauga, Halifax, and St. John's from October 2017 to April 2018. Second, how Islamic online spaces influence their offline religious engagements in post-migration Canadian contexts. Third, what roles the Internet and other digital technologies occupy in shaping the religious identities of my participants in their post-migration religious lives. I show how Islamic sects and sectarian differences in the Canadian public sphere are predominantly tolerant and respectful, also in how my participants imagine other groups. More specifically, I argue that my participants believe that describing their Muslim identities with reference to a particular Islamic legal tradition is either redundant or improper in Canada, where the nation state is committed to pluralism, equality and religious freedom. I also consider how the Internet is far weaker in determining religiosity post-migration than active in-person engagement. I conclude that the Internet facilitates information for my Muslim interlocutors to practice their religious identities in minority contexts, but is less important in determining their post-migration religious lives than is commonly imagined.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I arrived in Mississauga, Ontario on a snowy night in December 2017 to begin my fieldwork for this project. I traveled from the airport to my Iranian friend Shahryar's house with him and his 20-year-old son, Rafiq.[1] As we spoke on the drive, Shahryar asked me how I was finding my time in Canada in the three months since I had arrived. For him, Canada is the land of opportunities for Muslims. Shahryar immigrated to Mississauga with his wife Rana and their three children. They left a settled life in Qatar, where he worked as a doctor, and his wife, as a nurse. They had good incomes and free housing in a villa. In Canada, Shahryar started a new career as a case manager for a private insurance company. Rana started a certificate program in Public Health in order to be better qualified to find work.

I first met Shahryar in Qatar. He was the person who initially encouraged me to study in Canada, hence his special interest in what I thought about Canadian life. At that point, my insights on the subject were limited seeing that I had only been living in St. John's, NL for three months. My preliminary observation was that, religiously speaking, "practicing Muslim identities", particularly second-generation Muslim identities, are mostly negatively affected by a secular and pluralist atmosphere in Canada. In our car ride, I argued that this situation was negatively impacting the religious lives of Muslims living in Canada.

After we ate delicious *khoresh bademjoon*[2] and rice as a dinner prepared by Rana, I sat with the family in their living room.[3] Shahryar mentioned my opinions about my living experience in Canada to Rana who became interested in the conversation. In contrast to my

[1] I have used pseudonyms to anonymize all participants.
[2] Khoresh is an Iranian traditional stew made from meat, eggplants and Iranian spices.
[3] Throughout my stay in their house, I ate dinner with Shahryar and Rafiq. Rana and her two daughters ate before us. Also, during my stay, their 15-year-old daughter Sarah went to her room when I was in the living room. However, Rana and their 6-year-old daughter Fatima were in the living room when I was present in the room.

feeling, she and Shahryar claimed that they were practicing Islam in a "better way" in Canada due to living in a minority context. In Mississauga, they had become more conscious and careful on how they lived their Muslim identities in their relations towards people of other religions. Throughout my ten-day stay at their home, I also observed that the family used the Internet and other digital technologies prolifically. The Internet facilitated their communication with their families in Iran, and the game console was the primary source of entertainment for the family (i.e., watching Iranian TV channels, playing games). In several ways, my brief experience in their household was a herald for this exploration of Muslim identities in Canadian contexts and the impacts of the Internet on their religious lives.

1.1 Background of the Study

A quick look into cyber Islamic environments reveals that there are various Muslim understandings and practices of Islam even if for many believers there is only one true Islam (El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2009). I argue in this thesis that the transnational structure of the 21st[st] century and of cyberspaces and digital technologies are prominent in shaping contemporary Muslim identities (Bunt, 2003; El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2009; Mishra & Semaan, 2010). In the Canadian framework, so-called secular values, as well as ethnic and religious diversities, significantly impact Muslim identities. In her study of second-generation Canadian Muslim identities, Rubina Ramji (2014) argues that the Internet and digital technologies have a growing influence in shaping their identities. She suggests that the Internet plays a significant role in shaping the religious identities of second-generation Canadian Muslim youth rather than their families and community centers (Ramji, 2014, p. 119). Other qualitative studies on Muslims in Canada denote that families and local community centers remain central in the formation of

Muslim identities in a Canadian framework (Selby, 2016; Zine, 2008a). These different positions indicate that there is a need for further exploration of the evolving identities of Muslims living in Canada and the influences that impact their religious identities. More specifically, with few exceptions, scholars have rarely focus on the role of Islamic legal tradition preferences of Muslims living in Canada in the formation of their religious identities. Julie Macfarlane in her book *Islamic Divorce in North America: A Shari'a Path in a Secular Society* (2012) describes North American Muslim identities as complex, private, and individualized. Based on qualitative interviews, she discusses the ways North American Muslims conceptualize Islamic law concerning divorce. She claims that neither Canada nor America address Islamic legal needs of Muslims in the North American context. In this study, I further her argument by claiming that the socio-political context in Canada aims to diminish religious pluralism given that it imagines a society where Muslims abandon their Islamic legal differences and preferences to get along with each other. Indeed, as I will discuss, in the post-migration context, there is a growing tendency among Muslims in Canada to describe themselves as "Just Muslim" -- as my interlocutors do -- without referencing any Islamic legal traditions even though freedom of religion is guaranteed by law and religious pluralism is supported and encouraged in multi-cultural and multi-ethnic Canada.

Research Questions

This study investigates how my Muslim participants who live in Canada have understood, described and framed their identities and how they perceive one another as Muslims in this context. It is particularly focused on how religiously pluralist offline spaces shape the Islamic legal tradition preferences of the fifty-five self-defined Muslims I interviewed in

Mississauga, Halifax, and St. John's from October 2017 to April 2018. It also considers how Islamic online spaces influence their offline religious engagements in post-migration contexts. More specifically, this research asks:

1) What does "identity" mean for my Muslim participants in a religiously and ethnically diverse Canada?
2) Do Islamic sects and sectarianism matter for my 55 interlocutors? What do my participants think about Islamic legal traditions? To what extent and on what grounds are Canadian Muslim converts aware of the diversity of Islamic legal traditions? Do sectarianism and Islamic sects play a role in shaping Canadian Muslim identities? How do my participants perceive sectarianism in the broader context of religious and ethnic diversity in Canada? How have their descriptions of inter-Muslim relations been shaped in the post-migration context of Canada? [4]
3) How do the online religious experiences of my self-identified Muslim participants living in Canada influence their offline religious engagements and identities?

1.2 Overview of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter introduces the study. The second chapter discusses academic literature concerning Islam, secularism, pluralism, the Internet and the impacts of digital technologies in Western minority contexts on Muslimness with attention to contemporary Canada. The third chapter first demonstrates the methodological approaches employed to gather data. It then explains my qualitative and quantitative data analysis for the study. The fourth and fifth chapters rely upon mixed method data from participant observation

[4] The word sectarian or sectarianism in this study refers to different interpretations of Islam within Sunni Islam and Shia Islam.

and interviews. These two chapters analyze how online and offline spaces re-shape the religious identities of Canadian Muslims. In chapter four I argue that post migration the socio-religious pluralist context of Canada serves to unintentionally privilege the mainstream conservative understanding of Sunni Islam. In chapter five I show how the online engagements of my participants shape their offline Muslim practices. The final chapter presents the general conclusions, limitations of the study and recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review engages with four bodies of scholarship. Firstly, it examines literature pertaining to the historical development of the settlement of Muslims in Canada. Secondly, it analyzes secularism and pluralism in the socio-religious context of Canada in the scholarly literature to date. Thirdly, it explores the growing literature on cyber Islamic spaces, Muslims and Islam. Lastly, it considers the academic work on Muslim identity construction in Western minority contexts, with a focus on Canada.

2.2 Islam and Muslims in Canada

The presence of Muslims on Canadian soil dates back to the 19th century, before Confederation (Environics, 2016). According to the earliest records, the country had only 13 Muslims in 1871 (Waugh, Abu-Laban, & Qureshi, 1983, p. 76).However, the presence of Muslims has shown a dramatic increase since that date. The population of Muslims in Canada reached substantial numbers in the second half of the 20th century (Hamdani, 1999, p. 203). This growth was partly because of political and economic turmoil in Muslim majority countries after the Second World War and partly because of new openings in immigration law in Canada (Waugh et al., 1983, p. 77). A 2016 study by the Environics Institute argues that Muslims are one of the fastest growing minority groups in Canada at the same time as concerns and interest about Muslims are growing.

Today, Islam is the second largest religious tradition in Canada after Christianity. In the 1950s, there were approximately 3,000 Muslims in Canada (Jasmin Zine, 2012, p. 5). According to Canada's 2001 census, there were 579,740 Muslims in Canada, just less than 2% of the

population. In 2006, the Muslim population was estimated to be 0.8 million or about 2.6%. In 2010, the Pew Research Center estimates there were about 940,000 Muslims in Canada (PEW, 2013). The latest data collected on Canadians' religious adherence indicates that there were 1,053,945 (3.2 % of total population) Muslims living in Canada in 2011(Canadian Census, 2013). According to the Environics Institute's study on 'Muslims and Multiculturalism Muslims and Multiculturalism in Canada' in 2007, 65% of Muslims describe themselves as Sunni, 15% as Shia and the rest do not categories themselves as Shia or Sunni (2016).[5]

One of the significant challenges for new immigrant Muslims living in Canada is to adapt themselves to the Canadian environment (Abu-Laban, Qureshi, & Waugh, 1983). Therefore, many create their own "religious zones" to practice Islam as religious minorities. The mosques in Canada were the prominent places for Muslims to have a space to practice Islam. Lebanese Muslims built the first mosque, the 'Al-Rashid Mosque' in Edmonton, Alberta in 1938 (Abu-Laban et al., 1983; Waugh, 2018). In the same year, this mosque registered under the newly established Arabian Muslim Association. Since then, Muslim Canadians have built many mosques, educational, cultural and business centers to create "religious zones" for practicing Islam even in the most remote areas such as Midnight Sun Mosque in Inuvik, the Northwest Territories.

In Canada, Muslim minorities like Ismailis and Ahmadis are present alongside mainstream Muslim Sunni and Shia Muslims.[6] These groups also have received the attention of academics in Canada (Karim & Eid, 2014; Mamodaly & Alim, 2012). In fact, the available

[5] Given that I had very limited access to Shias during my fieldwork, these statistics do not map with the data and sectarian distribution of my qualitative data. I only interviewed with one self-identified Shia Muslim.
[6] Reliable quantitative data on the Canadian Shia population does not exist. Scholars estimate that 15 % of Muslims in Canada are Shia; Ismailis are considered as Shia but Ahmadis are not.

scholarship suggests that these Muslim minorities have been practicing more freely in the Canadian context than in most Muslim majority countries. For instance, in his book chapter "At the Interstices of Tradition, Modernity, and Postmodernity: Ismaili Engagement with Canadian Society" Karim H. Karim suggests that the rights and religious freedoms in Canada[7] create a socio-religious space where Ismailis can "operate in dialectical interaction with the community's systems of religious belief and social propriety" (Karim, 2011, p. 288). Similarly, Overmyer et al. in their co-edited book, *Asian Religions in British Columbia*, discuss that even though Ahmadis were declared as non-Muslims in their home country Pakistan in 1974, in Canada they have established their own institutions. There are approximately 25,000 Ahmadis in the country (Overmyer, Baker, & DeVries, 2010).

2.3 Secularism and Pluralism in Canada

Secularism is often considered as the separation of religious institutions from other "secular" institutions. Secularism is an ambiguous term discussed in the social sciences, including in religious studies (Agrama, 2012; Asad, 2003; Mahmood, 2016; Selby, 2012; Selby, Beaman, & Barras, 2018; Taylor, 1991). For some theorists, it entails relegating religious beliefs and opinions out of the public domain and the privatization of such belief (Haque, 2010). Elizabeth Shakman Hurd (2012) defines secularism as a contingent series of legal and political projects that define and manage religion. According to Paul Macdonald, secularism is established in the process of securing a community with freedom of conscience and tolerance for the practicing and expression of religious traditions (2017).

[7] Here Karim refers to the freedom of religion, of thought, of expression, of the press and peaceful assembly as expressed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the first part of the Constitution Act, 1982.

One of the challenges in examining the discourses of secularism in Canada is the definition of secularism itself. In broader terms secularism means the "separation and removal of what is deemed the religious or the private spaces of morality from domains considered public or political" (Selby, 2012, p. 72). In formulations of French secularism, namely in laicism, the distinction between these two spaces are more recognizable (Roy, 2007). For instance, in the context of France, secularism is imbedded in French political culture where religious persons and institutions do not interfere with the functioning of the state and state institutions does not interfere in religious affairs (Tarhan, 2011). However, when secularism is a question of Canadian discourse, the distinction between private/religious and public/political is more complicated than simply being separation of the two. Even though Christianity is the most adhered to religion in Canada, in the Canadian context, there is no legal separation of church and state. The Charter of Human Rights and the Multiculturalism Act in Canada guarantees the freedom of religion for all people living in Canada (Beaman, 2008) but do not formally annex religion in the public life.

This ambivalence is not the case in other contexts. In "Roots of the Headscarf Debate: Laicism and Secularism in France and Turkey" (2011) political scientist Gulce Tarhan examines how French secularism gave rise to social polarization in Turkish and French societies (2011). Drawing on Turkish and French models, she differentiates secularism and laicism. Tarhan argues that whereas secularism is more lenient to religious visibility in society, and in a secular state has a passive role that tolerates religious symbols in public sphere, in the laic model of contemporary France and Turkey, the state has an active role that limits religious visibility in public sphere and pushes religion into private arenas (2011). Similarly, Bader et. al. in their journal article, "Religious Diversity and Reasonable Accommodation in the Workplace in Six European Countries: An Introduction," compare how secularism functions both in the "individual religious

freedom cluster' and the 'collective religious freedom cluster" in England, the Netherlands, Denmark, Bulgaria, France and Turkey to ask how these six counties accommodate religious beliefs and practices in their "secular" contexts (Bader, Alidadi, & Vermeulen, 2013, p. 57). They suggest that Canada is more accommodating to religion than European countries (Bader et al., 2013).

In their co-authored book *Beyond Accommodation Everyday Narratives of Muslim Canadians* Selby et al. argue that an imagined notion of the secular is challenged, harnessed and shaped to frame religion in particular ways (2018).They suggest that in a post-1982 Canadian context, secularism is embedded within understandings of Christian normativity and that ordering mechanisms of the secular influence the daily routines of their participants in secular institutions (2018).

Still in the Canadian context, in recent years, spirited debates related to secularism and pluralism have been stirred up by questions around the availability of a sharia tribunal or court in Canada (Hosen & Mohr, 2011; Korteweg & Selby, 2012). These proposals have been encouraged by the ability, from the early 1990s until 2004, of Jewish and Catholic groups in Ontario, Canada, to use arbitration mechanisms rooted in their religious frameworks. The Jewish Court in Toronto, Beith Din, operated without any fanfare for many years. Tellingly, the use of religious arbitration mechanisms by religious communities only generated public debate when Muslim leaders announced their available services, akin to those utilized by Jews and Catholics in that province for matters related to divorce or civil matters in late 2004 (Hosen & Mohr, 2011). Although the legal permissibility of arbitrators adjudicating relying on religious notions was abolished in 2006, fear around the notion of Islamic law in Ontario revealed significant post-9/11 stigma for Muslim minorities in Canada. Highly publicized attacks in other European

nations and North American countries have also raised public debate on the compatibility of Islamic culture with so-called Western norms.

The increase in religious diversity of Canadian immigrants and the enshrining of Multiculturalism has led to the continued increase in the demand for recognition by these minority groups. In addition to that the rights of minority groups have been protected by 2a of the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms (The Constitution Act, 1982*).* For example, the construction of larger worship centers due to the increase in their population. Also, across Canada, beginning in the 1990s, we can begin to see the construction of private Islamic Schools, which encourage many public schools in the city to offer Arabic language.

The Pew Research Center (2013) and some other studies have proposed that the number of Muslims in Canada may rise to 2.7 million tripling its present figure by 2030, amounting to about 6.6 percent of the entire population of the country (Selby et al., 2018). This steady population growth and the institutionalization of Islam with the establishment of various Muslim organizations in the country has led to some public debates around the visibility of religion in Canada. There is data that show the social mistreatment of Canadian Muslims, i.e. the socio-economic discrimination (access to jobs, job promotion), the victimization (hate crimes), and the criminalization (ethnic profiling, effects of anti-terrorism measures) (Helly, 2004; Wilkins-Laflamme, 2018) .

While remaining relatively small (i.e. less than 4% of the population), a rapidly growing Muslim population in Canada and some major geopolitical events have heightened Islamophobia globally and in Canada. 9/11 led to a paradigm shift in the way Muslims are perceived in Canada: from relative indifference to being in the spotlight, legislatively and politically. The

scrutiny at times pushed Muslims to become more reflective about their religiosity and their spiritual path (Selby et al., 2018).

In her study, "Islamophobia in Canada? Women's rights, Modernity, Secularism," Helly (2012) investigates negative opinions of ultra-secularists, feminist organizations and xenophobic groups on Muslims living in Canada. The study was conducted using survey data to gather the opinion of respondents to understand the negative discourses on 'Islam' in Canada, notably in Quebec, where cultural nationalism, ultra-laicism, and defiance of judicial power are strong. Helly shows that about a third of Canadians "do not feel comfortable" with Muslims. In general, Canadians have a more positive view of Christians and Jews than of Muslims. Helly (2012) also cites a 2006 poll by the Association of Canadian Studies that observed that 24% of respondents said they had a very or somewhat cynical view of Muslims (compared with 10% having a negative view of Christians and 9% having a negative view of Jews). In Canada, Muslim women are often represented as victims and alienated agents (Helly, 2012) and experience intersectional discrimination related to race, gender and immigration status.

In *Beyond Accommodation: Everyday Narratives of Muslim Canadians*, Selby et al. investigate how Muslim Canadians live and how varieties of the secular order their everyday lives (2018). They conducted interviews with Muslims living in St. John's and Montreal, Canada. One of the participants, Nour, who considered herself a Muslim and was born and brought up in Canada, found herself working in a public institution where Christianity remains dominant. She shared her experience of working in a secular environment. Selby, Barras and Beaman asked, how do Canadian Muslims navigate and negotiate this environment? How do attempts to define and locate religions impact the lives of their participants? According to the study, most of their interviewees, like Nour, "do not experience Canada as religiously neutral.

Rather, they encounter and live within a country they recognize as intrinsically Christian" (Selby et al., 2018, p. 87). Indeed, the Muslim Canadian interlocutors' experiences show the prevalence of the idea that Christianity has been successfully privatized, while Islam, in contrast, is imagined as public, non-neutral, and, therefore, available for commentary, adjudication, and regulation.

In *Homegrown, Muslim and Other: Tolerance, Secularism and The Limits of Multiculturalism*, Haque (2010) discusses the specific representation of Muslim women in Canada with particular attention to the media representation of Aqsa Parvez's death. Haque discusses secularism in the multiculturalist context of Canada with particular focus on second generation Muslims. In analyzing Aqsa Parvez's murder, she says

> The death of Aqsa Parvez and the subsequent arrests of her father and brother in early December 2007 set off a media storm in the weeks following as all aspects of this story were taken up in the media and provided 'watercooler chat' fodder well into the holiday season. For those of us recognizably of the 'Muslim woman' category, this also meant having to field a relentless onslaught of unsolicited opinions about the oppression of Muslim women in her barbaric culture with prescriptions for her liberation and proscriptions for Islam bestowed upon us indiscriminately. The sensationalist and spectacular nature of the media representation of Aqsa's death day after day on the front pages of Toronto papers wasn't merely to provide filler in a slow news week; rather, as Asad (2003) has outlined, the media mediates the imagination, construction and sensibilities that underpin the ways in which individuals simultaneously imagine their national community (2010, p.85)

Thus, how Aqsa's death was repeatedly portrayed in the local and national media constructed a particular narrative about the dangers of Islamic culture and the tragedy of Muslim women's lives inviting the public to share in a particular "social imaginary" of Canada as a secular and tolerant nation. In this way, the story of Aqsa Parvez as it was developed through the circulation of media narratives and images all worked together to produce a particular national description about a secular and tolerant multicultural society in danger from barbaric and intolerant fundamentalist others. The account of Aqsa's death as a crisis of multiculturalism and integration

is the latest in a long line of media inflamed hysterias positing Muslims in Canada as victims and generating hate speech about them. However, the transition between ideas on immigrants and Muslim minorities is more favorable in Canada than in France. (Haque, 2010). This difference is partly because skill-selected immigrants in both Canada and Québec are often viewed by the public as financial assets (Haque, 2010). In the secularism of religion out of the public domain into privatization, the government aimed at integrating the multicultural diversity of Canada (Reitz, Simon, & Laxer, 2017). The adaptation of public institutions to Muslim religious practices remains limited in France, with sections of the governmental authorities challenging the constructions of mosques in some areas of the country. In contrast, in Canada, the Supreme Court of Canada has tended to uphold a broad and subjective approach to religious freedom using the principle of reasonable accommodation (Reitz et al., 2017).

Public expression of Islam, such as the visibility of the hijab, the reference to sharia law or the use of religiously visible garments that are strictly upheld in other European countries is more "reasonably accommodated" in Canada. Standing up for one's religious conviction as a Muslim, which is also considered as "obscurantism" in some European countries are also less pronounced in the multicultural states of Canada (Reitz et al., 2017).

In sum, by almost any comparative yardstick, the degree of religious, cultural and structural pluralism in Canada is very high. The persistent ethnic and cultural diversity of Canada has given rise to the popular image of Canada as a "mosaic", sometimes contrasted with the American "melting pot". This contrast is misleading if it is taken to mean (as it often is, by many leaders of immigrant ethnic groups in Canada) that immigrant groups can retain their ancestral language and culture in Canada while having to relinquish it in the United States (Laczko, 1994).

The religious pluralism differs somewhat across different regions and provinces of the country. Muslims, both native-born and immigrants in mainstream and Islamic institutions, often react to this pluralism in various ways. Some had to contend with being marginalized due to their race, gender, status, religion or dress. In most cases, many of the minority groups have come to realize that some of their peers were only inquisitive and curious about their background and not judgmental. This revelation is not too surprising since the pluralistic nature of the country has revolved into multiculturalism; that is, people who have different culture and religion. It must be stated that such inquisitiveness can cause uneasiness and make one feel alienated. To combat this situation, many Muslims in Canada respond by combining Islamic symbolism (such as visibly religious garment, e.g. *hijab*) and their so-called Western identity (such as long-sleeved tunics and jeans), creating a form of hybrid identity. In most instances, many Muslims who might have fallen victim to discrimination often joke about the ignorance pointed at them. Some others combat this challenge by participating in interfaith activities where they can hold a peaceful dialogue. Others still join groups such as the Muslim Students' Association as an effective strategy (Adam, 2011).

Canada has a comparatively peaceful and settled liberal democracy, with enriched yet divided religious and cultural differences. The Canadian government in bid to accommodate and effectively integrate the minorities adopted international religious freedom policy, which has been in operative in some developed nations such as Germany, UK, Norway, Italy, USA, and the Netherland. Although, the policy was later discarded due to the perceived bias in her administrative yet the willingness of the government to follow the step of other enlightened nations gives the validation of the legitimacy of the Canadian government for a pluralistic

society (Joustra, 2014). The attempt also underscores the government's obligation to recognize and support cultural minorities in the interest of equality.

In sum, Canada is a multicultural country whose approach to contain the diversified population in peaceful coexistence has led to a secular approach that widely accepts the visibility of religiosity (with the exception of contemporary Québec, which falls outside this study), with the relegation of religion opinion or belief out of the public light. The lack of empirical evidence and in-the-field research contributing to the narrative of Muslim life in Canada also limit the exploration of the perceived bias towards Muslims in Canada. The pluralistic features of the country are seen it its multiculturalism and provision of various policies to support the integration of both minority culture. Thus, in my concluding chapter I discuss to what extent and on what grounds my findings provide empirical data to explore the impacts of religiously and ethnically diverse and putatively secular context of Canada on formations of Muslims identities.

2.4 Cyber Islamic Spaces

Muslim engagements with online spaces have been developing for the last two decades. Increasing cyber Islamic interactions are, at the same time, generating growing academic work on Islam Online. Gary R. Bunt, professor of Islamic studies at the University of Wales, is one of the prominent figures working on digital technologies and the Internet in Muslim majority settings. In his book, *Islam in Digital Age*, Bunt defines cyber Islamic spaces and investigates the impact of online spaces on the Islamic tradition. He defines cyber Islamic spaces as "an umbrella term which can refer to a variety of contexts, perspectives and applications of the media by those who define themselves as Muslims" (2003, p. 5). He focuses on the way in which "*e-jihad*" and "religious authority" *(i.e., fatwa)* are engaged in cyber Islamic environments (2003). Bunt

engages with many different websites from the Sunni majority and minority contexts and with few Shi'a and Sufi perspectives. He examines fatwas online on different up-to-date topics such as marriage, worship, alternative lifestyles, and family problems. He concludes that cyber Islamic environments can re-form religious interpretations and expressions of Muslims both living in minority and majority contexts (2003, p. 135-167). Bunt further says that in some settings, online spaces function as a unique network of information and an instrument for the reinforcement of or development in identity for individual Muslims and organizations (2003: 207). Similarly, I claim that the Internet and digital technologies remain at the forefront of shaping the religious identities of Muslims living in Canada.

In *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam,* Bunt (2009) examines the extent and basis to which Muslims use "Cyber Islamic Environments*"* to reveal, transform, and reinforce their religious beliefs, societies, and identities. How can "IMuslims" be utilized in a contemporary context (p. 6). Bunt pays close attention to whether the representation of Muslim understandings in online spaces is a process/continuum of offline spaces or not. He examines both social media and Islamic blogs to highlight the changes in Muslim societies through cyber interaction. Bunt concludes that even though not all Muslims have been affected by cyberspaces, "at least directly," Muslim engagement with the Internet will shape different interpretations and expressions of Islam online and in Muslim networks (2009, p. 5).

Similar to Bunt, anthropologist Jon W. Anderson (1999) in his book chapter "The Internet and Islam's New Interpreters," shows how new media forms and the Internet shapes faith, gender, and authority in Muslim communities. He sees the Internet a new means that creates "opportunities for alternative expressions, networking, and interpretations that draw on and extend its techniques" (p. 56). Moreover, he argues that "Islam on the Internet highlights not

just new interpreters but also the presence of intermediate contexts that reflect a more nuanced diversity of views, settings, projects, and expressions of Islam today" (p. 53). In my own project, I look at the extent to which these new media forms and the Internet have shaped the identities of multi-ethnic, non-Sunni Muslim minority Muslims living in Canada.

Wagner and Gainous (2013) discuss Muslims engagements more politically. In their journal article, "Digital Uprising: The Internet Revolution in the Middle East" (2013), they explore the implications of Internet use on issues relevant to political opinions in the Middle East where the primary argument circulated on the idea that Internet transcends an equalizing effect when government filtering is little. The notions can be built up that Internet use provides some potential good effects particularly in absorption of vital political knowledge, boosting political participation and gearing up attitudes regarding Western nations while in comparison with Middle Eastern countries where negative trust in government in Middle Eastern countries with relatively low government filtering practice. Restriction of political communication and organization stems from implemented rules, structures and management of the specific institutions. The Internet definitely has a recognizable function as a medium to overcome political and institutional barriers via multiple mechanisms (Chadwick and Howard, 2010) that can influence receivers of communication to decide into what outcomes of politics they would coordinate.

Understanding emerging differential patterns of Internet access adoption and usage across segments is what the author Dilmaghani presents as key ideals for his article, "Religiosity and the Digital Divide in Canada," in which demographic variables such as gender, age and socio-economic characteristics are taken into their linkage towards presence of digital divide (2018). This article concludes that the more Muslims are religious the less they engage with online spaces.

In sum, the scholarly discussion on cyber Islamic spaces shows that Muslims uses the Internet for communicating with each other, their political activism, expressing their opinions when offline spaces restricted and accessing and spreading Islamic knowledge. Given that there is the lack of empirical data on cyber Islamic spaces in Canadian socio-religious context, it is difficult to examine the role of online spaces in the formation of religious identities of Muslims living in Canada. There is not also any specific study that discusses gendered experiences and gender preferences of Muslims living in Canada while engaging with online spaces. Thus, in my concluding chapter, I discuss the way in which online spaces shape Muslims identities and how their online experiences differ from their offline engagements.

2.5 Muslim identities in the Canadian Context: Online and Offline Spaces

There has been a considerable growth of scholarly interest in Muslim identities living in Canada. Some literature argues that Muslims modify their identities in order to acculturate themselves within the context of Canada (Beaman, 2012; Fatima, 2011; Ramji, 2008). Some other literature indicates that they prefer to practice and preserve their Muslim identities (Selby, 2016; Eid, 2007; Zine, 2008). This section examines this literature to position my own work as exploring how online and offline spaces play role in shaping religious identities of Muslims living in Canada.

On the one hand, Beaman (2012) investigates public discussion concerning the notion of reasonable accommodation. She focuses on the way in which religious diversity is approached and managed in Canada. She questions what prompted this public interest and from where the idea of reasonable accommodation came. She posits that in the Canadian context, discussions on identity, diversity and equality are shaped in the sphere of religion. She concludes that even though religion is intertwined with "other identity markers or points of references in claims-

making processes," religion is dominant in shaping identities (Beaman, 2012, p. 1). Similarly, I will consider how a context which favours reasonable accommodation within the framework of religious diversity, forms Muslims' identities in the socio-religious context of Canada.

Similar to Beaman, Fatima (2011), in her article, *"*Who Counts as a Muslim? Identity, Multiplicity and Politics," investigates how Muslim identity can be negotiated in order to obtain and maintain political participation in the liberal democratic context of the contemporary United States. Fatima argues that Muslims are considered as political blocks that resist together in the current geopolitical context of the USA. Thus, she believes that American Muslims should create a political identity that allows them to participate without being a marginal minority. By analyzing examples of Muslim identity within political movements, Fatima concludes that Muslims can mobilize their religious identities in order to perform an active existence in their daily lives (2011). In my study, I argue that Muslims living in St. John's, where the Muslim population is small, also negotiate their identities, whether unconsciously or consciously, in order for them not to appear as the stranger.

In "Being Muslim and Being Canadian: How Second-Generation Muslim Women Create Religious Identities in Two Worlds" Ramji (2008) investigates how second-generation Muslim women understand, describe and frame their religious identities in the socio-religious framework of three large Canadian cities: Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal. Ramji suggests that given that second-generation Muslims have been raised in Canadian culture, they "feel completely at ease" in their religious lives (2008, p. 199). She argues that Muslim young women in her study have demonstrated that they prefer to seek out Islamic knowledge from the Internet and academic books rather than asking religious authorities in their local mosque. Ramji concludes that second-generation Muslim women in Canada neither maintain their immigrant parents' Islamic

traditions nor are they exposed to assimilation by the dominant culture. Instead, they negotiate their identities (2008, p. 205). I concur with her that, in general terms, Muslims living in Canada negotiate their identities. I also argue that to some extent the socio-religious context of Canada plays a role in reforming religious identities.

In her other work on second-generation Canadian Muslim youths, Ramji (2014) analyzes to what extent and on what grounds second-generation Canadian Muslim youths interact with online spaces to seek Islamic knowledge and how this engagement shapes their Muslim identities and practices in offline settings. She suggests that second-generation young Muslims employ a logical and sensible approach to strive for understanding Islam. She imagines that this approach provides them with a "distinctive (re)construction of Islam," concluding that their cyber-Islam interactions enable them to construct and enhance independent religious identities (2014, p. 114). I similarly argue that the Internet and digital technologies are at the forefront of shaping the religious identities of the Muslims living in Canada. However, I also claim that their communities rather than online spaces mostly shape religious identities of those who have a close link to local religious communities.

Eid (2007), who works on immigration and ethnicity in the Quebecois context as a qualitative sociologist, analyzes the relationship between ethnic and religious identity retention among Arab-origin youths who study in five different CEGEPS in Montreal. In his analysis, he pays attention to the influences of socio-cultural factors, gender-related traditionalism and perceived discrimination and stereotyping in preserving ethnic and religious identity. Eid argues that because most of the Arab-youths believe that Canadians and media disrespect their Arab ethnicity and Islam, they decide to keep their Arab-Muslim identity secret. He concludes that

even though religion is more prevalent, both religion and ethnicity are interconnected in youths' identity retention (2007, p. 190).

On the other hand, Selby (2016) discusses how six young Muslim women in the Greater Toronto Area have understood and negotiated *mahr* (the dower) during their marriage process and the role of the Internet in this process. She contextualizes her fieldwork findings with analysis of *mahr* in online spaces. Selby concludes that while the young women consult websites and forums a great deal, their family and familial religious norms remain prevalent for the establishment of marriage life (2016, p. 211). Differently, I argue that the Internet occupies a more important role in the daily Islamic lives of Muslims in Canada than the influence of their families.

Jasmin Zine in her article "Honour and Identity" (2008) investigates how Canadian Muslim women identities, both in terms of gender and religion, are formed and negotiated in the context of prevalent patriarchal norms of Canadian private Islamic schools. Zine gathered ethnographic data from 18 months of fieldwork in Islamic schools in the Greater Toronto Area where she conducted participant observation in classrooms and undertook 49 interviews with parents, school administrators, teachers and students between 1991 and 2001. She argues that patriarchal practices in Canadian Islamic schools lead youthful women to resist these kinds of norms, which generates a type of Islamic feminism. She concludes that there are a number of different discourses (protection, regulating gender interaction, public honor) that aim to limit and dominate Muslim youth in Islamic schools (2008, p. 66).

Despite of the limitations and pressure on Muslims living in Canada, in their extensive survey with 600 adult Muslims and 300 Muslim youth living in Canada in English, Urdu, Arabic and French conducted from November 19, 2015, to January 23, 2016, the Environics Institute

has found that despite how Canadian Muslims are exposed to stereotyping and discrimination, they remain remarkably positive about Canada. They also conclude that even though there is a ‘broader secularising trend in Canada", the religious identities and observance still are ‘important and growing' in the Canadian context (Environics, 2016). Similar to their finding, in chapters 4 and 5, I explore why Muslim identities are significant and remain prominent in the daily lives of Canadian Muslims, as well as the roles of the Internet and digital technologies in this equation.

Chapter 3: Methodological Approaches

3.1 Introduction

Identity has been a significant subject of study by researchers utilizing various methodological approaches. I believe that different approaches enable us to explore different aspects of identity. Mixed methods enable social scientists to have a more comprehensive understanding of the processes of identification (Monrad, 2013). This study, therefore, utilizes a mixed qualitative – quantitative approach in order to examine the roles of online and offline spaces in the formation of Muslim identities living in Canada.

3.2 Qualitative Data: Fieldwork

Kvale (2007:132) asks: "If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk with them?" I have similarly thought that if I want to investigate how Muslims living in Canada understand their religious identities and what roles the Internet and digital technologies play in the socio-religious context of Canada in this identification process, why not talk with them? In this regard, I conducted fifty-five semi-structured interviews with Muslims and did some participant observation during my fieldwork in St. John's, Mississauga, and Halifax between October 2017 and March 2018.

3.3 Interview Questions

The interview questions that I utilized for this study were originally written for a larger SSHRC-funded project called "*New Muslims Public Spheres in the Digital Age: Identity, Community, Diversity and Authority in Canada"*. It is a nation-wide collaborative research project that investigates the functions of the Internet and digital technologies within the daily lives of Muslims living in Canada and how they interact with cyberspaces. Four Canadian

universities have been collaboratively working on this project for five years. These include researchers at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM); the University of Regina (Saskatchewan); the University of Cape Breton (CBU) and Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN).[8]

In the pre-designed interview template of the project, there are 100 questions that focus on community, diversity authority and identity. However, I focused my attention in this thesis on the first 37 questions specifically related to identity, Internet usage and demographic information of the participants. [9]

3.4 Conducting Interviews and Participant Observation

As a self-identified practicing Muslim researcher, my participant observation started from the very beginning of my arrival to St. John's. However, I formally started conducting interviews after the training and approval of the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) of MUN in October 2017 (see appendices). From that date, I conducted interviews in St. John's, Halifax and Mississauga.

Initially, it was a challenge to ask Muslims to conduct a 100-question interview schedule given that it would take between 30 minutes to 2 hours of their time. For this reason, I utilized a snowball method by asking my interlocutors to explain and encourage their friends and colleagues to participate in my research project. In both Mississauga and Halifax, I visited local community centers, mosques and universities to find participants. In these places, I focused on the community leaders who helped me to explain my project to recruit participants. The local

[8] Dr. Roxanne Marcotte (UQAM) is the principal investigator and my supervisor Dr. Jennifer Selby (MUN) is one of the co-investigators for this project. I have been working as a research assistant for this project since September 2017.
[9] Here I refer to questions 1-37 in the interview schedule. Please see Appendix A.

community center and the mosque I attended in Mississauga is linked to National Outlook (a political Islamic movement) based in Turkey. The participants in the mosques I visited in Halifax were largely followers of *Tablighi Jamaat.* The mosque in St. John's was not associated with any religious groups. All the mosques I visited during my fieldwork were following Sunni-Islam.

All these approaches helped me to conduct interviews with Muslims from various job proficiencies, education levels and ethnicities. The interviews took place both in public and private spaces. Most of the interviews occurred in coffee shops, on university campuses, in mosques, restaurants, offices and community centers. On some occasions, my interlocutors invited me to their homes. All the interviews were recorded with a voice recorder with the consent of participants. I conducted 18 interviews in St. John's, 10 interviews in Mississauga and 27 interviews in Halifax.

As an ethnographer, I believe that participant observation is as indispensable as conducting interviews. Participant observation reveals the issues that participants are not able to talk about or prefer not to say. In order to increase my involvement in participant observation, I mobilized my own Muslimness. I went to restaurants with Muslims, attended their *halaqa* (reading circles) after prayer and visited their homes. As a Muslim researcher, I was welcomed by many Muslims that I met throughout my fieldwork. However, some university professors were reluctant and suspicious of participating in the project, even if they appreciated the project when I explained it to them.[10] Interestingly enough, these suspicious university professors helped me to recruit university students as participants since they believed it was a useful project.

[10] When they heard that Université de Québec à Montréal was the institution of the principal investigator, they expressed reluctance given that there have been attacks on Muslims in recent years. These interlocutors believed that the Quebecois government is not friendly to Muslims who live in Canada.

3.5 Participants in the study

I conducted interviews with fifty-five Muslim participants from fifteen different ethnic origins including three Canadian Muslims converts (see fig. 1). As shown in the chart below, the vast majority of my participants had Pakistani, Turkish, Bangladeshi, and Indian origins. These four ethnicities comprise more than 50% of my participants (see fig. 1). Thirty-three of the participants are male and 22 of them are female. The residency status of the participants as follows: 43 Canadian citizens, 6 permanent residents, 4 with study permits and 2 with work permits. According to Statistics Canada, Pakistanis are the largest ethnicity as Muslim in Canada, similarily in my data, participants of Pakistani origin also occupies largest place.

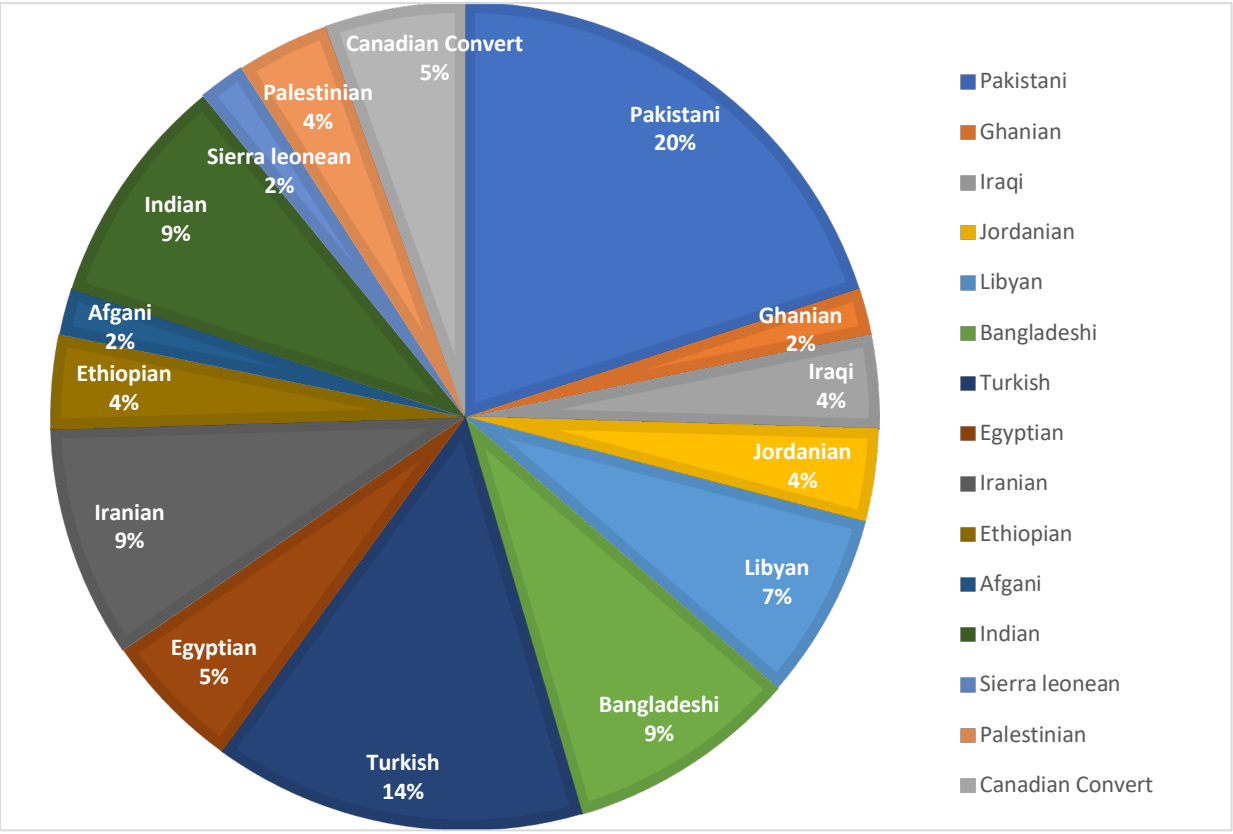

Figure:1 Participants' Ethnic Origins [11]

[11] 2% stands for 1 participant, 4% stands for 2 participants, 5% stands for 3 participants, 7% stands for 4 participants, 9% stands for 5participants, 14% stands for 14 participants, 21% stands for 11 participants,

I recruited most of my participants through mosques and community centers. Given that all of them are practicing Sunni-Islam, my sample is largely shaped by Sunni-Muslims who I consider as “practicing Muslims” rather than “cultural Muslims”.

3.6 Analyzing Qualitative Data: Utilizing “NVivo” Software

I conducted fifty-five semi-structured interviews for the project. Given the number of interviews, following transcription, I used "NVivo" software to analyze the qualitative data and create nodes. In order to form “NVivo” nodes, first I chose keywords and phrases that serve me to explore how for my Muslim participants describe their identities in a religiously and ethnically diverse Canada. I highlighted these keywords or phrases (e.g. Muslim Canadian, *Shia,* Just Muslim) in the transcripts. I created a code for the highlighted keywords and phrases to compare and analyze all the transcripts for the same phrase. Then, based on themes of each nodes, I made the graphs by using NVivo software. [12]

3.7 Analyzing Quantitative Data

The quantitative data I used for this study was originally gathered as qualitative data from the larger project. Instead of analyzing all 100 questions from the interview template, I selected the first 16 questions focused on demographic information about participants and another ten short answer questions related to the identity and Internet in the interview template (please see Appendix A: Interview Schedule). I analyzed them to generate descriptive statistic for each variable I chose. Finally, I transformed the data into the tables and charts as output.

[12] In August 2018, I received “NVivo” training.

Mixed method approach allowed me to compare and cross check my qualitative and quantitative findings. For example, throughout my interviews I questioned the views of my participants on Islamic sects and sectarianism qualitatively. However, I would not have clear understanding of general tendency of participants towards Islamic sects and sectarianism quantitative. Similarly, qualitatively I explored that while participants pay attention to gender segregation in offline spaces, it is not important for them in online spaces. However, I would not prove my findings if I do not test it quantitatively as well. That is to say, mixed methods provide me opportunity to use triangulation to enhance the reliability and validity of my findings.

Chapter 4: Muslim Identities Offline in Canada

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the roles of offline spaces in the identity formation of Muslims living in contemporary Canada. Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data, this chapter investigates how my participants have understood, described and framed their identities in their everyday lives in Canadian socio-religious public spheres. It particularly focuses on how religiously pluralist and freely offline spaces shape the Islamic legal tradition preferences of the fifty-five self-defined Muslims I interviewed in Mississauga, Halifax, and St. John's from October 2017 to April 2018.

As mentioned earlier, in various ways since the 1800s, Muslims have created spaces to practice Islam in the multi-cultural and multi-faith milieu of Canada. As discussed in Chapter Two, in order to acculturate themselves into Canadian society, some have negotiated their religious identities with different effects, as scholars have shown. (Beaman, 2014; Fatima, 2011; Ramji, 2008). However, some others have preferred to practice Islam actively in Canadian public spaces (Selby, 2016; Eid, 2007; Zine, 2008). To put it differently, Muslims living in Canada often adapt their "Muslimness" to fit in Canada. However, this negotiation is not only shaped by the personal preferences of individual Muslims, but also by the Canadian society in which they live. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter Two, cyberspaces are also playing a role in the formation of Muslim identities in contemporary Canada (Bunt, 2003, p. 207).

This chapter covers a number of grounds. First, I examine how the level of engagement Muslims have with mosques and Muslim groups in Canada influence the Muslim identities of my participants. Using the "accommodation approach" described by Beaman "as the dominant way of thinking about religion and diversity" (2008, p. 199), I consider how my participants in

Mississauga, Halifax, and St. John's use mosques, *musallas*, and MSAs as religious zones to protect and construct (or reconstruct) their Muslim identities.[13] I explore how Muslim organizations in these three demographically diverse Canadian cities shape individual and group identities of Muslims. Here, I discuss to what extent and on what grounds mosques, *musallas*, and MSAs foster both "cultural Muslim" and "practicing Muslim" identities. Second, I focus on the ethnic, national, and religious preferences and concerns of Muslims in Canada. Here, I discuss religious vs. ethnic/national inclinations in three categories, which I introduce: (1) Canadian Muslim, (2) Muslim Canadian, (3) or Other (for non-citizens). Lastly, I discuss how my participants understand Islamic sects and sectarianism. More specifically, I explore to what extent and on what grounds Islamic sects or sectarianism are part of the identities of my participants. In this last section, I also examine how converts specifically conceive of Islamic sects and sectarianism. Muslim converts, I show, are mostly outsiders of the discussions concerning Islamic sects and sectarianism.

4.2 Mosques, *Musallas* and MSAs: Shaping individual and group religious identities

St. John's, Newfoundland

As a self-identified practicing-Muslim researcher, my observations concerning Muslims living in Canada began as soon as I arrived at St. John's International Airport on September 16, 2017. From the very beginning, I had known that my religious experience in Canada would be different than the Muslim majority countries of Turkey and Qatar, where I had lived earlier. St. John's was the first "Western" city I had lived in, and where Muslims represented a minority

[13] Musalla is an Arabic word refers to a room or an open space where Muslims pray. In Canada, Muslims rent or buy a part of buildings mostly in commercial complex to use as a musalla in the absence of a mosque in a neighborhood. The prayer rooms provided by universities in Canada also can be called as musallas.

which makes 3.2% of total the population (Statistics Canada, 2016). At the time, my friend Ahmad was the only person that I knew in St. John's. I was housemates with his older brother in Qatar, where I also met Ahmad in Qatar's Education City mosque. After he received his master's degree from Texas A&M University in Qatar, Ahmad received admission from the Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN) to complete his doctorate. Ahmad was a practicing Muslim from Nigeria. Throughout his childhood, he undertook Islamic training in the mosque near his house, beside his primary school. The first two nights I stayed in Ahmad's basement apartment nearby MUN, I learned that Ahmad was staying with a male and a female housemate, both of whom were Christians from Nigeria. When I learned about his housemates, I could not understand how, as a very religious person, he was living with two Christians, especially one who was a woman.[14] Later, he explained to me that he had been staying elsewhere, but that there had been a problem in the apartment, and he could not find another place to stay. For this reason, he felt compelled to move into his current apartment for a few months until his wife and children were able to travel to St. John's to join him. We spoke to one another in English. Ahmad had a very nice voice and recited the Qur'an in Arabic very well. A few months after his arrival, the Muslim community in Masjid-an-Noor discovered his wonderful *qira'at* (recitation), and from that time, he was one of the unofficial imams of the mosque. He taught the Qur'an to Muslim kids in the city, both at the mosque and in their homes. Almost every day, he gave *maghrib* (evening) and *isha* (night) prayers in Masjid-an-Noor.

The reason why I mention my friend Ahmad's story in this section is that he was both an imam at the city's one masjid and the Qur'an teacher for the kids. He had to be flexible in his Muslim identity so as to fit the realities of the small Muslim community in St. John's. As my

[14] Here, my surprise was for two reasons: (1) In some interpretations of Islam in which I believe, it is not appropriate for a Muslim to stay with the opposite gender in the same house if that person is not a close relative.

***Figure 1:Masjid-an Noor from the outside (St. John's, NL)* , Photograph by Mehmet Ali BASAK, March 2018**

experience grew in Canada, I understood that his living arrangements did not reflect a lack of religious sensitivity but were due to need and financial circumstances. Masjid-an-Noor is the only mosque in St. John's and was built in 1990 by the Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (MANAL) In fact, it is the only publicly available official place for the St. John's Muslim community to have access to Islamic teachings (see figures 2 and 3).

***Figure 2:Male praying area in Masjid-an-Noor, (St. John's, NL)* , Photograph by Mehmet Ali BASAK, March 2018**

Apart from daily prayers and my friend Ahmad's personal Qur'an teachings, activities at the mosque at the time of my fieldwork were focused on a weekend school for kids and one small *tafseer* (exegesis of Qur'an) circle once a week. Notably, there is no paid imam position, or a person who officially coordinated the mosque's activities on a full-time basis. The board and its activities are run on a volunteer basis. I did not observe any activities for young adults, though there were a significant number of Muslims students studying at MUN. Their activities were more focused on the MSA on the university campus. Indeed, with the exception of *jumah (Friday) prayers*, I very rarely observed youths attending the daily prayers in Masjid-an-Noor. In fact, there were only about 20-30 Muslims regularly attending daily prayers in the mosque, even though more than 1,000 Muslims are reported to be living in St. John's. Most of the attendees were executive members of MANAL and their children. In part, this might be explained by the

mosque's distance from the campus and downtown areas and the lack of public transportation to the mosque. I came across the same situation when I conducted interviews with my participants studying at MUN. Most of them attended the mosque only if there was a very special Islamic event (where often there was bus transportation provided by the Muslim Students' Association) and were even praying Jumah prayers in the chapel nearby the university. Among my participants, only two young women, 21-year-old Aysha and 19-year-old Naima, mentioned that they go to the mosque with their parents' car to volunteer on weekends with the children's Islamic school. As my interviews continued, I discovered two main reasons for the low level of participation in St. John's. The first reason is the remote location of the Masjid-an-Noor. The mosque was built outside of St. John's and no city buses passed close by. In fact, the closest bus stop was a 10-15-minute walk. When we think about the extreme winter conditions in Newfoundland, only those who can afford to have a car and have the time to commute can access the mosque. [15] My 50-year-old participant from Libya, Moaz, who lived in London, Ontario before moving to St. John's, explained the reason for his disengagement with the Muslim community. He complained:

> Sometimes, I find myself very happy okay, because I find the good environment as a Muslim here (Canada), there's a good community, so I attend[ed] the Mosque regularly [in London, Ontario]. But sometimes when I move from city to other city, I face some trouble because I didn't find that living from the facilities for the Muslims community. For example, we can we can take [the] example as [when I] moved from London, Ontario to St. John's. You found back, here is difficult compared to London, Ontario because just one mosque and this mosque in the east of St. John's open to two times per day, it is very difficult for me to go the mosque. While over there in London Ontario, there were many mosques and *musallas*. Even the mosque was only two hundred metres far from my house, [so] all my prayers were in the mosque.

[15] Before the snow hit in the month of December, I went to the mosque by bus twice. I arrived 20 minutes before the *adhan* time, and the door was closed. Then, after 15 minutes, one of the executive members came and opened the door with his card. When I asked the reason, he told me that it was for security. The mosque automatically opens 5 minutes before *adhan* and closes after the prayers. Only MANAL executive members have a key card, so if you are not an executive member and come before prayer time, you are obligated to wait outside no matter the weather conditions. Given that I was coming by bus, I arrived earlier in order not to miss the prayer with j*amaat*. After the same thing happened to me three times, I stopped attending the mosque unless I was able to go by car with a friend.

The second reason for low participation in St. John's in my opinion is the shared view of the volunteer MANAL executives, which I see as contributing to a lack of accessible religious activities for young Muslim adults. I came to see this position following my interview with 30-year-old Hassan. Hassan came to St. John's 10 years ago as a university student. After he completed his schooling, he married a converted Muslim and decided to settle in the city. He mentioned that in his earlier years, he was an active Muslim in the university and with the MSA. He gave Friday sermons and tried to organize events for the university students. According to him, he spoke several times to MANAL's executives to request their support for the activities. Instead, they warned him that Muslims represented a very small minority in St. John's and that to draw the attention of St. John's at large would be negative. From Hassan's perspective, there were inadequate activities to engage young adults with the mosque.

To be fair, this interpretation could be unjust. A different participant, 25-year-old MUN student Fatima, said, there have been "halaqas, there are social gatherings and there's, like, Eid preparations, Ramadan preparations festivals and stuff for the local Muslim society apart from daily prayers" taking place in the mosque. She found a place and time to engage with the St. John's community through its mosque. Mariam, a 20-year-old MUN student, described the mosque as representative of Muslim group identity, despite the fact that she occasionally prayed there. "The mosque community is very, very important because it kind of represents all of us, all the Muslims here in St. John's", Mariam said.

In addition to this local mosque, there is also a *musalla* at MUN. A musalla is a room or open space where Muslims observe their daily prayers both individually or with congregation, mostly they also do not have an official imam. Both male and female students used the *musalla* at scheduled times. During the time of my fieldwork, the musalla was small and not appropriate

for any kind of religious gathering, so there was limited interaction there. There was also an unofficial mobile musalla in the MUN library. There was a *musalla* group on the mobile app, Viber, created by students who studied at the library. Five to 10 minutes before every prayer, one of them would announce prayer time in the group chat, so whoever wanted to pray could meet. They gathered, opened the carpet, and prayed there together. When the prayer was finished, they removed the carpet. After I had difficulty in going to the mosque, I became a consistent member of that Viber *musalla* group and started to pray with them. I was invited by Abdurrahman. In this mobile musalla, Muslim students at MUN were able to get to know each other. Sometimes after prayer, we would go for coffee together. Essentially, this unofficial mobile musalla functioned as a means of socialization for Muslim students.

The Muslim Students' Association (MSA) at MUN was another platform for Muslims to practice their religious identities in St. John's. This student group is significantly the largest and most active on campus. During the months of my fieldwork (October – April), I participated in nearly every event organized by the MSA. The participants were mostly Muslim students and their families, but I also observed some non-Muslims students at the events. Throughout the academic school year, they held a number of activities such as Islam Awareness Week, Quiz Nights and Islamic Movie Screenings. One of the members of the MSA, 20-year-old Zainab, mentioned the significance of the MSA for her and their activities in this way:

> [The] MSA is too important for me because I find a lot of people that share the same opinions as me. It's very, because it's only community that relates to my faith here. I'm [a] member of the Muslim Students' Associations in Memorial University and I'm sister social coordinator and I try to do my best, to advocate for [Muslims? Women?]. Well, we have events almost once or twice a month, but we also have bi-weekly meetings and one is today. We do a lot of *dawah* booth, hijab booth, Quiz night, Islam awareness week, we do bring in speakers to talk about Islam and things like that way you have lectures one done by you literally, we do a lot of things but it depends on who is the present at the given time.

Another student, 21-year-old Iraqi Taha, said:

> It [the MSA] was so and very important that when I came in here, I felt like that now I can live here [in St. John's]. Before getting to know the people [the MSA community] I was so depressed and feel lonely, so it is as important as studying here…. Mostly, I socialize at MSA that's where I make new friends and spends time with them.

Throughout my interviews, I came across similar statements about the role of the MSA for Muslim students at MUN. Another important point explicitly raised by the MSA president at one of the events is that the MSA at MUN is not only for practicing Muslims, but for everyone, regardless of whether he or she practices Islam. This statement demonstrates how the MSA functions as a public space where Muslim students can practice their religious identity and socialize with one another, regardless of being a cultural or a practicing Muslim.

1) Mississauga, Ontario

Compared to St. John's, my participant observation and fieldwork in Mississauga (and later Halifax) was much shorter and limited due to financial and time constraints. I spent less than three weeks in these two cities, though I believe it was long enough to assess the influences of demographically different cities on Muslim identity. As I mentioned at Chapter One, I stayed at my friend Shahryar's house during my fieldwork in Mississauga where 12% of the total population is Muslim. Given that I am of Turkish origin, he thought that it would be easier for me to access Turkish Muslims in Mississauga. So, the day after I arrived (December 12, 2017) he brought me to the Anatolia Islamic Centre (AIC) in Mississauga. We arrived at the AIC one hour before the *zuhr* (noon) prayer. Unlike the Masjid-an-Noor in St. John's, the masjid of the center in Mississauga was open, and people were reading the Qur'an and other religious books before the prayer started.

***Figure 3:Masjid of Anatolia Islamic Center, (Mississauga, ON)* , Photograph by Mehmet Ali BASAK, January 2018**

Afterwards, I took a tour in the building and came across the imam's room. The imam, Mohammed, was an Iraqi Turkoman in his early 60s.[16] He had been working full-time in the center for six years at that time. After I introduced myself, we spoke about the center. It was established in 1998 by Turkish migrants who came to Canada to work in construction in the 1990s. As the years passed, it took its current shape (see fig.4). The center has a mosque that can accommodate more than 1,000 people, a primary school with an Islamic curriculum, a banquet hall for weddings and other special events, and a funeral home.

[16] Later on, I learned he was one of the three imams of the center and none of them was of Turkish origin.

Even though the center was shaped largely by the Turkish community, there were also Muslims of other nationalities and ethnicities who observed daily prayer in the mosque, who participated in Muslim events, and even worked in the center. As our conversation continued, I mentioned my master's thesis to the imam and asked him to participate in an interview. He smiled and said:

> I am too old for this interview and I don't understand from Internet so much. But you are very lucky! Sisters are having one-week winter camp now in the center, let's ask them. They may help you. I think they are in [the] dining hall now.

When we entered the dining hall, the lunch was over and there were two middle-aged women who were responsible for the "sisters' winter camp." I introduced myself and received their permission to conduct interviews with some of the women the next day.

This mosque is quite different from the one mosque in St. John's because of its theological and ethnic focus on Turkey and because it has a full-time imam and staff. Based on my experience in St. John's, I formed the opinion that Muslims, especially the youth, lose their practicing Muslim identities and become increasingly cultural Muslims after having lived in Canada for a while. However, my view changed as I conducted interviews with the some of the participants of the sisters' winter camp. Many of them were second-generation Canadian Muslims with Turkish ethnic origins or had moved to Canada from Turkey in early childhood. The way they wore hijab, conducted themselves, and spoke indicated that they were, indeed, practicing Muslims. Throughout the interviews, I came to understand the center as being very crucial in shaping their Muslim identities. They perceived the center as more than a religious space where they can observe their daily prayers. When I asked how important the community center was to them, a 20-year-old student Derya said, "It's a second home." She went to the AIC at least once each week and whenever there was an event, and even volunteered her time to help

out in various capacities. Here she outlines some of the activities the Center undertakes beyond worship:

> For example, we had fundraisers. We had a program last year and we're going to do it again, that the kids arranged, they did all the acting, they did all the talking and they did towards their parents to show them that you know parents love towards their kids isn't just about what you buy for them but more of the actual love that a parent should give. You know spending more quality time with them, having fun with them than just buying them things. We also have winter camps. We do a lot of fundraisers. For example, we do big [bake?] sales once a week. We have conferences like the motivation day, a lot.

Derya then mentioned that she had not worn hijab before participating in the activities of the centre. Arzu, another 21-year-old university student, mentioned that, like Derya, her awareness of her "Muslimness" was fostered through attending the events and interacting with other young practicing Muslims. For her being a Muslim in Canada:

> …means a huge thing because it's really diverse here and as a *hijabi,* I do represent my religion because if you were to see a Muslim man, you're not going to know he's Muslim, but when you see hijab wearing women, you know they're all Muslim. So [here, compared to outside the mosque], I do need to watch out the way I act, the way I behave and the way I speak, and I need to represent my religion in the best manner.

My other four participants from the AIC also remarked that joining the center both strengthened their sense of being Muslim, helped them to begin to see themselves as representatives of Islam in Canadian society.

I also participated in Jumah prayer in the mosque. Even though most of the attendees were Turkish, the Friday sermon was in English. The imam was talking about the necessity of trustfulness in social life. Then, he read the following *hadith*:[17]

> Abdullah ibn Mas'ud reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "You must be truthful. Verily, truthfulness leads to righteousness and

[17] Hadith is the words and behaviors of the Prophet Muhammad, a general rule that is highly valued received as a major source of religious law and moral guidance.

> righteousness leads to Paradise. A man continues to be truthful and encourages honesty until he is recorded with Allah as truthful. And beware of falsehood. Verily, falsehood leads to wickedness and wickedness leads to the Hellfire. A man continues tell lies and encourages falsehood until he is recorded with Allah as a liar."[18] (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* 5743)[19]

The imam continued by expounding on how it is important to always tell the truth and escape from cheating people as a Muslim living in Canada. He remarked that Muslims should be more sensible in their practice of Islam in a non-Muslim majority country such as Canada. He said that, when in a Muslim majority country, wrong or immoral acts are attributed to the character of that individual, not because of Islam. In Canada, however, when a Muslim behaves immorally, non-Muslims may believe that it is because of his or her religion that individual lying or deceiving. In sum, I think that both the anecdotes from this Friday sermon and the comments from my participants earlier highlight that the presence of a Muslim organization, such as the AIC, can further the identities of practicing Muslims in a religiously diverse, non-Muslim majority space like in Mississauga.

Apart from regular participants of the AIC, I also conducted three interviews in Toronto with participants I met in Mississauga. One of them was a 45-year-old mortgage broker named Ferit. He came to Canada from Turkey to learn English when he was 19 years old. Then, after he finished language school, he applied as a refugee, attained citizenship, and studied at the University of Toronto. Since the completion of his studies, he has not been back to Turkey. Ferit was originally from the same city where I born. When he learned this, I became his guest until it was time for me to leave to return back to St. John's. Over the course of the day I spent with him, I observed that he did not practice daily prayers, and when we went to eat, he was not concerned

[18] Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl, and Muhammad Asad. 2013. Sahīh al-Bukhârî: being the historical chapters of the Kitâb al-Jâmi'as-Sahîh compiled by Imâm Abû'Abd Allâh Muhammad Ibn Ismâ'îl al-Bukhârî.
[19] Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī is one of six major hadith (prophet Mohammed's sayings and acts) collections of Sunni Islam

with choosing halal foods. However, he graciously found me places to pray and directed me to appropriate halal options. He referred to himself as a “very moderate Canadian Muslim”. Ferit has never been married; for him gender currently plays no role in how he socializes with people, despite how sexual segregation was a concern for him a few years earlier while he was in university. Ferit does not formally belong to a Muslim community, but he occasionally attends different mosques for Eid prayer or Friday prayer in Toronto. My participant observation during our leisure time together, as well as during our interview lead me the see how, after a period of time, Muslims who are neither affiliated with any Muslim community nor participate in their activities may become more “culturally Muslim” , characterized by a low level of Islamic practice in Canadian society.

2) Halifax, Nova Scotia

During my ten days of fieldwork in Halifax, I stayed in an apartment close to the

Figure 4:Dartmouth mosque from the outside, (Halifax, NS). **Photograph by Mehmet Ali BASAK, January 2018.**

Dartmouth mosque (see figures 5 and 6).

The Dartmouth mosque is located in eastern Halifax on 42 Leaman Drive in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. The Islamic Association of Nova Scotia built the mosque in 1971. Since then, the seven mosques in the area have functioned as a socio-religious space for Muslims in the Dartmouth and Halifax. Many Muslims live in the neighboring area around the mosque.

Given that it was close to where I was staying, I prayed at least once each day in the mosque. Unlike the St. John's mosque, there was an official imam in Dartmouth Mosque, and it was frequently crowded with people of different ages and nationalities. On weekdays, mostly male Muslims attended the prayers. But on Fridays and weekends, females and children also joined the prayer in the second floor of the mosque. On the days I attended, the Dartmouth mosque

***Figure 5:Dartmouth mosque male praying area (Halifax, NS)*, Photograph by Mehmet Ali BASAK, January 2018.**

community consisted primarily of taxi drivers, students, business owners, engineers, government officers, and professors. The Imam of the mosque, Ammar, was also religious leader of the Islamic Association of Nova Scotia. His parents migrated to Canada from Pakistan forty years ago. He was born and grown up in Canada. After every *zuhr*(noon*)* and *asr* (afternoon) prayer,

he read one *hadith* from *Riyad-al Salihin* and explained it in English to the attendees.[20] After every maghrib prayer, there were a *halaqa* (Islamic discussion group) concerning worship, faith, and Muslim social life. The mosque community was very dynamic and colorful. I heard from one of the members that many male attendees go to camp together every summer and play soccer once a week after *isha* prayer. Even though they seemed to be adapted to life in Halifax, the members I met actively maintained their practicing Muslim identities. One of my participants, a 48-year-old software engineer named Munir, portrayed himself as a Muslim living in Canada as follows:

> To be a good Canadian citizen observing Canadian laws and contributing to the Canadian society, as well as protecting my Islamic faith and eternity and growing my family with values that are a combination of Canadian values and Islamic values that, you know, any Canadian values that do not contradict with Islamic values or ethical values, we basically accept all these things.

Similar to what Munir pointed out about balancing obligations, my other participants from that mosque were well aware that they live a Christian-majority country. They spoke openly about how, during the day at work, at school, and in other public spheres, they sometimes encounter situations that contradict their Islamic values. However, given that they live in a society whose public sphere is shaped by secular values and religious diversity, they have to navigate and negotiate their Muslim identities (Selby et.al., 2018). For instance, one of my participants, 38-year-old Pakistani-born social worker Farhan, mentioned that he was once invited to a dinner with a group of his female and male colleagues by their manager. The restaurant they went to did not have halal meat, and some of his colleagues at the table also chose to drink beer with their meals. He said:

[20] Riyadh al-Salihin or The Meadows of the Righteous, also referred to as The Gardens of the Righteous, is a compilation of verses from the Qur'an supplemented by hadith narratives written by Al-Nawawy from Damascus

> At home (in Halifax) when we have guests, we sit men and women separately. But in the restaurant, we sit mixed but at least I managed to sit near a male colleague. As a food I chose a veggie diet. And even though, I don't like the smell of the beer, I forced myself to stand for it. You know we are living in Canada, so sometimes we have to endure differences.

The mosque was especially crowded after *maghrib* and *isha* prayers. My participants in this mosque community said that praying at least once each day in the mosque and socializing with their Muslim brethren helped to recharge their religious energy that they felt they sometimes lost during the day in Canadian social life.

Figure 6:Ummah Mosque from outside, (Halifax, NS), **Photograph by Farhan KHALID, May 2018**

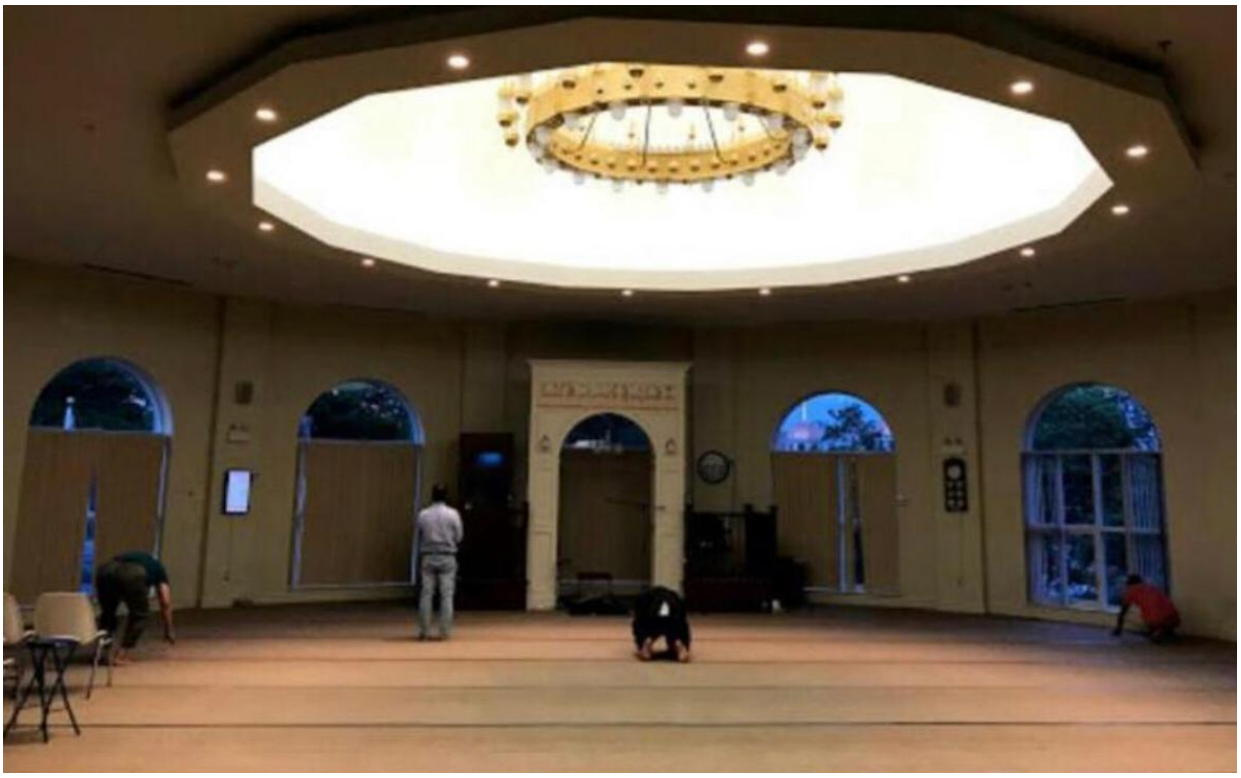

***Figure 7:Male Praying Area, Ummah mosque, (Halifax, NS),* Photograph by Farhan KHALID, May 2018.**

During my fieldwork in Halifax, I was invited for a breakfast by one of my participants at the Ummah Mosque (see fig.7 and 8).

This mosque is located west of Halifax on 2510 Matthias Street. The bus stop is only fifty metres away from the mosque. The imam of the mosque, Abed, is 50 years old. He is originally from Afghanistan but has been living in Halifax for 38 years. This mosque organized a breakfast every Friday with the male mosque community. After *fajr* (morning) prayer, the male mosque community sat together in a circle position *(halaqa)* in the prayer area (see fig.8). The imam read some hadith and verses from the Qur'an on maintaining brotherhood among Muslims. Then, he spoke about the necessity of supporting Muslim brothers and sisters through sharing and spending time with them in the Canadian minority Muslim context. He also encouraged those in the community to visit those members who had not been coming to mosque. He saw it as a duty for every Muslim in the community to invite other Muslim brothers and sisters to the mosque

and other Islamic activities. He remarked that it is very crucial for every Muslim living in Canada to pray in the mosque regularly and engage with Muslim community activities because in the Canadian social life and work atmosphere, there is almost nothing to remind them their "Muslimness." After the *halaqa*, they laid plastic tablecloth on the floor. Everybody put whatever food they brought from their homes and we shared an enjoyable breakfast together in the mosque. During the breakfast, they talked about the needs of the mosque and the upcoming winter camp for the kids to be held the following week. In sum, this was a dynamic space where members of the mosque regularly participated in both prayer and social activities.

Throughout my participant observation, I discovered situations where mosques, musallas and MSAs provided a religious environment to foster dynamic Muslim communities for Muslims that did not already have this type of support socially in Canada. For instance, Wafa, a 27 year-old software engineer, who came to Canada when she was seven years old, described that she was living with a family that she described as "cultural Muslim". Contrary to her family, she had decided to practice Islam as a "moderate Muslim." She said:

> I grew up [in Halifax] with friends who did not care for my religion. Yes, I grew up in a multicultural environment, but I started wearing hijab when I was 11. It was my decision; my parents were actually completely shocked that I decided to wear it. And my friends had a hard time understanding that…
> MB- Is your mom a hijabi?
> No, she is not. Just me [Laughter]. In all my extended family, I am the only one who wears it. I think it was something I just understand as children, and then as I got older, I found that some of my friends would respect my choices as a Muslim, but some of them wouldn't. And a lot of the difficulties that I had with were actually with Muslims themselves because when you wear the hijab sometimes they feel guilty for not wearing it, and then they will say, "Oh but I am Muslim too and I still do these things," and why aren't you participating in doing that? I am not faulting them for what they do, it is just that for me personally I hold myself on that religious standard and I want to do that. [. . .] I go to a Kearney Lake Masjid, which is in Bedford [Nova Scotia]. I go every week…I teach their weekend school, so I teach like the *Sira* [life of prophet Muhammed –PBUH] course and stuff like that to the kids there. I have also done *Hijab* workshops; I have done *halaqa*s for girls and stuff like that. So, I participate in those things. This

> community is pretty important, for me because I have such good Muslim friendships there, and religious support.

Wafa's story highlights the role Muslim organizations and communities play in the religious life of Muslims living in a Muslim minority Canadian socio-religious context. These organizations and communities not only transform the religious identities of Muslims, but also encourage Muslims to maintain these identities through socializing together, teaching each other, and helping each other preserve what it means to be Muslim in Canada.

Based on my participant observation in St. John's, Halifax, and Mississauga, as well as the interviews with participants about their views regarding living in Canada as a Muslim, I discovered how their engagements and disengagements with Islam influence their Muslim identities in contemporary Canada. I have found that mosques, musallas and MSAs are significant Islamic spaces for practicing, maintaining and transforming Muslim identities. Additionally, I observed that Muslims living in Canada both accommodate their religious needs and Muslim identities in multi-religious and multi-cultural Canadian everyday life. Observant Muslims feel the necessity in having religious zones to practice Islam and keeping their Muslim identities in a majority non-Muslim society.

4.3 Being a Muslim in Canada: Canadian Muslim, Muslim Canadian or Other?

As I mentioned at Chapter Two, there are over one million Muslims are living in multi-cultural Canada (Canadian Census, 2013). Similar to Canadian society at large, the Muslim minority society is shaped by different ethnic backgrounds and global nationalities. In this section, I discuss how this ethnic diversity, the experience of living in different parts of Canada, and residency status inform Muslims' preferences and concerns. I also explore how these factors influence how they define their national and religious identities. I drew three questions that probe

preferences and concerns regarding national and religious identity from our larger interview schedule of 100 items (please see Appendix: A). During the interviews, I asked my participants "What does it mean for you to be a Muslim living in Canada?", "How do you identify yourself, religiously and nationally?", and "As a Muslim, what do you think about living in a religiously plural society with secular values like Canada?". I received varied responses to these questions.

During my fieldwork, I noticed that there were various motivations why Muslims from different parts of world came to Canada where Islam is a minority religion. The main purposes my participants endorsed were: to receive better education, to live in better standards, to help their children succeed, and to escape from despotism and conflict in their home country. As the participants in this study chose to settle in Canada themselves, they were aware of the need to accommodate their ethnic and religious values to Canadian society.

The diverse ethnics origins of my participants seem to have influenced the way in which they identify themselves as Muslims in the Canadian context, as well as their concerns about secular and pluralist values of Canadian society.

One of the most significant issues participants raised throughout the interviews was that Canada offers much more religious freedom and openness toward new cultures compared to their home countries. For instance, 55-year-old university professor named Rashid in St. John's stated:

> I practice Islam, my faith, more freely than [in] my country. When I came to here in 1992, in my country, Libya, religion wasn't that much free. When I came Canada, I saw more freedom, I met many friends here around, I practice my religion with my friends. Actually, I practice my religion freely and with respect in here.

Remarkably, Rashid is originally from Libya, a Muslim majority country. However, he reported practicing Islam more freely in Canada than in Libya, and he has been calling Canada home for more than a decade. Rashid was working as a professor at MUN and regularly observed his daily prayers in the mobile musalla at the MUN library. I argue that Rashid's point on religious

freedom is not due to having a better physical space in which to observe daily prayers (in fact, Libya may offer more spaces for this purpose), but more so to being treated with dignity, honesty, respect, and justice as a Muslim. In fact, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act confirms Rashid's opinion. It is said

> The Government of Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada *(*Canadian Multiculturism Act,1985)

I observed that my participants explained their appreciation of this freedom to express their religiosity in Canada. Although Christianity is the majority religion in Canada (67.3% of the population according to the 2011 Census), both religious pluralism and the Canadian way of understanding secularism that merges religious identities contribute to the freedom of religion in public spaces in most of their experiences. This freedom is contrasted with the tradition of confining religious practices to private spaces and the staunch separation of church and state as is the case in other contexts, as described in Chapter Two. I heard similar testimonies about religious freedom in Canada from some other participants. For 23-year-old Murad, an accountant of Palestinian origin who lives in Halifax, Canada is "definitely one of the best countries to live in in the world since you do have religious freedom and freedom of speech, and if someone imposes on that freedom or tries to take that freedom away from you, you can go to court." He therefore appreciates the legal protection for the freedom of religion. Similarly, 18-year-old Canadian-born Zeynep, who has Turkish origins and is studying as a university student, remarked:

> To be a Muslim living in Canada, I think that were very lucky because we have more freedom and we also have like right now we have a better community and back home it's

> not the same and the way we were brought up here is like I feel like there's a lot more access to religion here and people are more accepting

Like Rashid, Murat, and Zeynep have pointed out, religious freedom is possible in the socio-religious context of Canada. In her article "Is Religious Freedom Impossible in Canada?", Beaman claims that there are three reasons that contribute to freedom of religion in Canada: 1) The blending of global religions with the existing social structure of Roman Catholicism in Canada formed a balanced and distinctive understanding; 2) The Constitution of Canada acknowledges the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, facilitating multiculturalism; and 3) The Supreme Court of Canada identified religious freedom as a subjective concept that alters depending on how individuals perceive and practice it (2012:272).

Despite of some of my participants' gratitude for freedom of religion in Canada and recent academic investigation into it (Beyer, 2008; Beaman, 2010; Tardif, 2012), some of my other participants still see pluralist and secular values of Canadian society as a threat to their Muslim identities, especially for younger generations born in Canada). For instance, 50-year-old Kamal of Egyptian origin who has been working in Halifax as a physician, explained:

> I think there are merits to living here. One is able to freely practice his own religion and enjoy the freedom in the country even though the identity of one's children could be affected by the opposing and differing one's own background.

Kamal felt fortunate to live in Canada when he compared it with his previous life in Egypt, but he was still afraid that non-Islamic values in the society may negatively influence/the religious identities of his children, even though he himself was an observant Muslim and participated frequently in Islamic events with his family in Ummah mosque in Halifax. I heard a similar view from the 38-year-old volunteer community leader of the Anatolia Islamic Center during my fieldwork in Mississauga. He was one of the community members who built a small *masjid* in the current place of the center. He mentioned that when he was 17 years old, there were around

40 young boys coming to masjid. They were children of Turkish immigrants who came Canada as construction workers. He went on to say that currently he is the only one of this group of boys who still comes to the center to practice Islam. He described the other 39 boys as "lost" regarding their practicing Muslim identities. He disclosed that he himself was "lost" for 11 years, and that he returned to practice Islam only in the last decade. He considers their Islamic center a shelter in maintaining one's Muslim identity in contemporary Canada. Thus, he works as a volunteer in the center to organize events and activities for preserving religious identities of young girls and boys.

Another issue raised by some other participants is the existence of Islamophobia as a Muslim in Canadian society, despite the freedom of religion discussed earlier. The following three statements highlight the situation further. Twenty-three-year-old Maryam, an administrative staff member at Dalhousie University in Halifax, is a Canadian-born woman of Ethiopian origin, and identifies as Muslim Canadian. Maryam said:

> I think living in a society [that is] religiously plural or many religions is great in promoting different understanding and ways of being and knowing. I don't know whether Canadian society is secular or not, but I do enjoy in a society that has many different understanding ways of being. On the one hand there is it is ingrained that we have freedom of religion, but that doesn't mean that Islamophobia isn't present in Canada. So, I guess it's a combination of being able to practice your religion but still but there're still existing discriminatory beliefs among people practices and systems.

42-year-old Mustafa, a religious spiritual leader at the Islamic Association of Nova Scotia in Halifax, is Canadian born of Indian origin, and labels himself as Muslim Canadian. Mustafa explained what he sees as some of the limitations to his religious life in Canada:

> There are benefits and cons, religious society obviously you'll be able to it's easier to preserve your religious identity but with a non-Muslim community, it becomes a challenge.

At the same time, Mustafa also sees some benefits to religious life in Canada:

> But since we are living in a country where things, there's no counter measures, no one is stopping you from practicing your religion. So, the challenges are there, but because of the freedom, it becomes easy.

28-year-old Saqip, a PhD student at Dalhousie University in Halifax, is a Canadian citizen with Pakistani origin, and labels himself as Canadian Muslim, remarked:

> What it means to be a Muslim in Canada to me is almost like having to work extra hard at adhering to the religion because I think it is not easy as opposed to living in a Muslim country with a majority where you fit in, you are comfortable with your religion and your cultural background is compatible. So, lot of times, being in Canada, where the religion and culture around me, there is a lot of incompatibility many times, and I just see other pressures kick in from that.

All three participants acknowledge the advantages of religious freedom in the society. However, they also described situations where they have experienced discriminations and difficulties as a practicing and visible Muslim. Maryam, like the three *hijabi* female participants in Halifax and Mississauga, emphasized the presence of Islamophobia in the Canadian public sphere. According to Mustafa and Saqip, Muslims need to dedicate greater effort to preserve their religious identities in Canada compared to those living in Muslim majority countries.

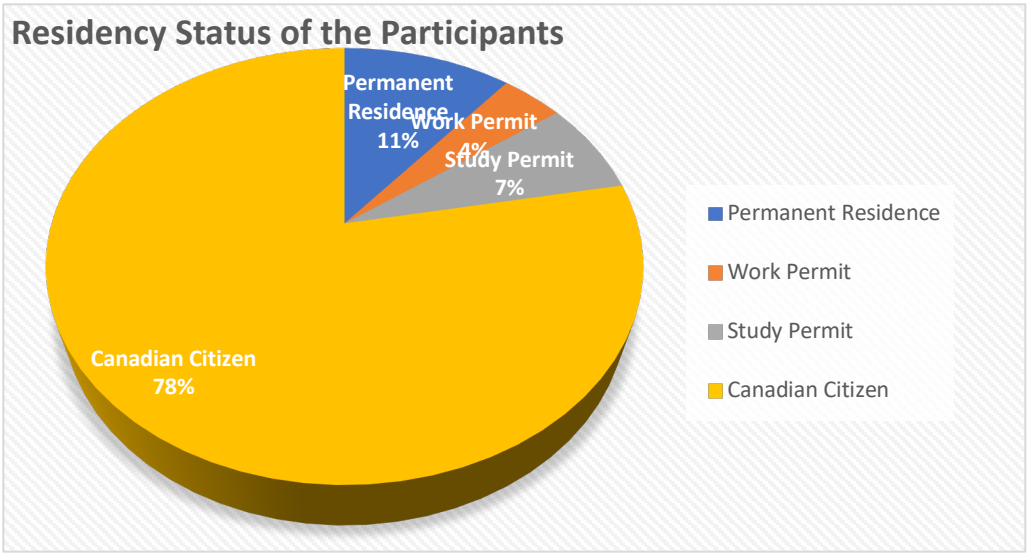

Figure 8:Participants' Residency Status

Another important point regarding the religious lives of my participants is to what extent their residency status impacts the way they identify with calling themselves Canadian.

As seen in Figure 9, 78% of my participants held Canadian citizenship; 11% were permanent residents. In other words, 89% of them had permanent status in Canada while only 11% of them were in Canada temporarily. Before I started to conduct interviews, I expected that only those without permanent status in Canada would not label themselves as Canadian. However, as it is shown in Figures 10 and 11, there are some participants that do not label themselves as Canadian despite holding permanent status in the country.

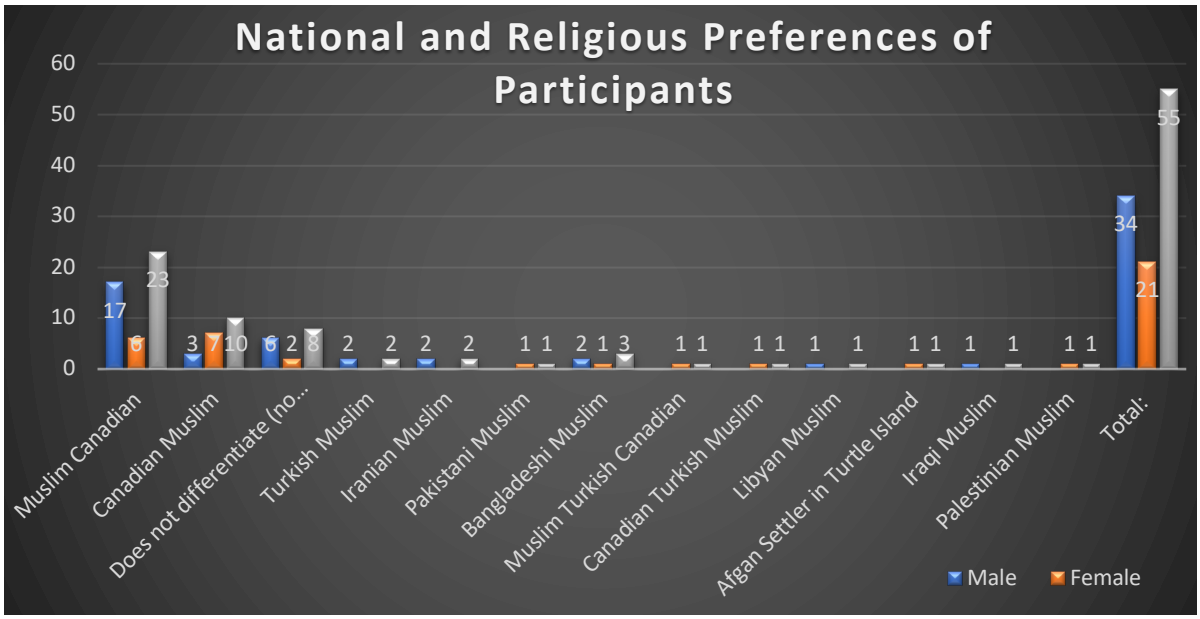

Figure 9:National and Religious Preferences of Participants with Numbers

This graph (figure 10) shows that among the sample, there is a preference for participants to label themselves as Muslim Canadian rather than as Canadian Muslims. While 23 participants labelled themselves as "Muslim Canadian," only 11 of them preferred the label "Canadian Muslim". 18 participants did not link their identities with Canada in any way, though eight of them did not perceive either label as being superior to the other. I believe that five of them are those who do not have a permanent status (please see fig.9). Thus, they do not consider

themselves as belong to Canadian identity. I argue that given that Canadian identity is not based on an ethnic origin, the other 13 participants label themselves with their ethnic origins rather than calling Canadian identity. Another reason can be that they do not feel themselves belong to

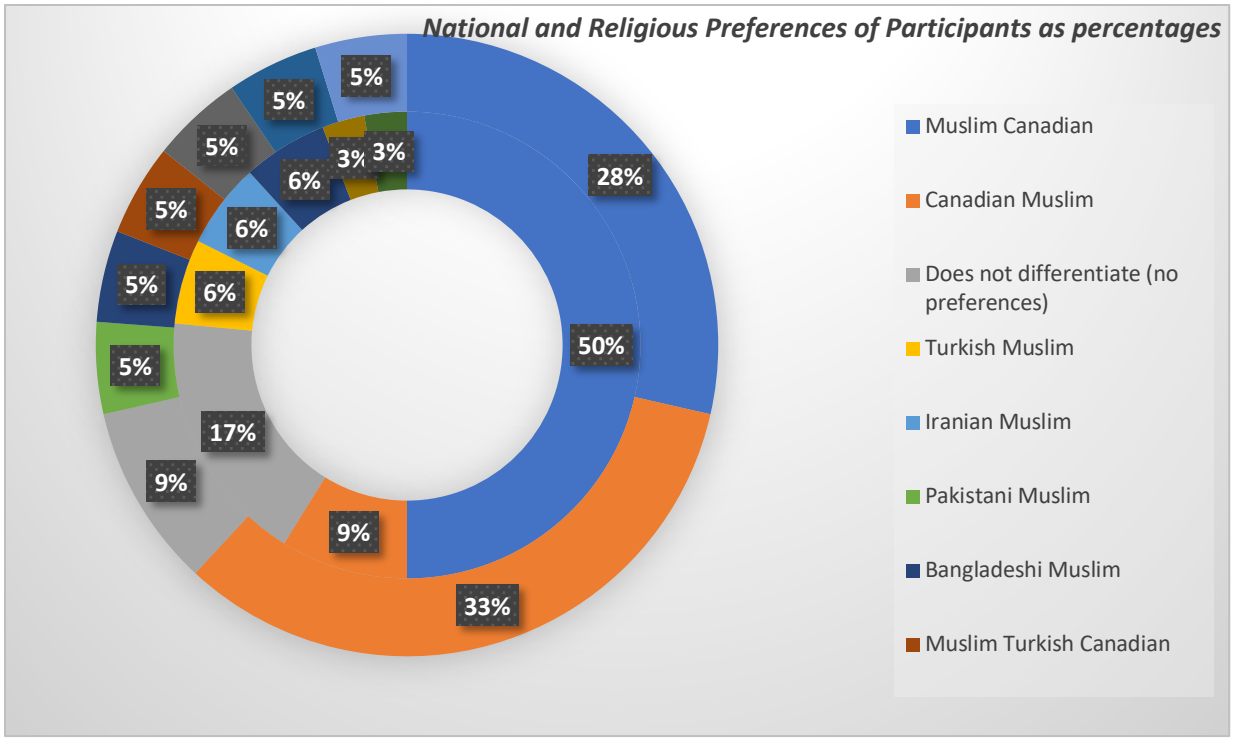

Figure 10:National and Religious Preferences of Participants as percentage

Canadian society or they plan to go back their home countries in future even though they have permanent status in Canada. We also see that ethnic origins are important for some participants, regardless of their residency status. It is notable that, when participants used their ethnicities in their self-assigned identities, they unanimously selected their ethnic origins prior to "Muslim" in the label (100%). The reason for preferring ethnic origins before Muslimness is that all them come from Muslim majority countries where Muslim identity already is merged with ethnic/national identity. However, those who labelled themselves as Canadian Muslim or Muslim Canadian mostly preferred to identify themselves as Muslim first, and then Canadian (32%).

According to the chart, male participants mostly preferred the Muslim Canadian label, whereas female participants labelled themselves as Muslim Canadian and Canadian Muslim almost equally (fig. 9). The chart displays that, while 50% of male participants identify themselves as Muslim Canadian, only 28% of female participants identify themselves as Muslim Canadian. Even though 33% of females consider themselves Canadian Muslim, only 9% of male participants consider themselves Canadian Muslim. The chart also demonstrates that 41% of male participants and 39% of female participants label themselves something other than Muslim Canadian or Canadian Muslim. I theorize that Canada provides better opportunity to have equal rights and freedom for women than most of the Muslim majority countries where men are more dominant than women. Thus, female participants tended to prioritize being Canadian to being Muslim in their identities more than male participants. Given that the number of female participants who preferred to label themselves as Canadian Muslim or Muslim Canadian, I claim that, on the one hand, female participants originally coming from countries where female identity is oppressed, adopt being Canadian more easily in their identities than female participants originally from Muslim majority countries where Muslim women have better rights and freedom. To put it differently, they believe that Canada creates opportunities for them to practice their female Muslim identities and have equal rights as males. That is to say practicing female Muslim identities in a better way has become only possible through being Canadian/ being in Canada.

As it is also seen in the graph, some of my participants failed to articulate a need to differentiate Muslim and Canadian identities or saw both as equivalent. For instance, I had the following conversation with 38-year-old Ammar, a Canadian citizen of Pakistani origin who

worked as a production lead in a private company in Halifax. I interviewed him at Tim Horton's in Halifax:

> MB: How do you identify yourself, religiously and nationally? Do you see yourself as a Canadian Muslim, a Muslim Canadian, or other?
> A: I don't relevance between Canadian Muslim and Muslim Canadian, some people like to use one before the other, at the end of the day I am both, the order does not matter because as long as I am in Canada I am accepting the rules and values of this country, I am Canadian at the same time I am a Muslim I am accepting the values and beliefs of this faith, so having one over the other does not give any preference, if it does then one should make a choice.
> MB: So what would you choose?
> A: I will choose to be a Muslim.
> MB: Muslim Canadian?
> A: No, they are both equal. The fact that Canadian is second does not mean that it is less for me, because the way the question is asked is as if I am a Muslim Canadian or Canadian Muslim, and Canada is doing something against Islam how should I respond, and that's wrong because if I don't like what Canada is doing I can leave Canada, surrender my passport, give up all the benefits which are the reasons why everybody is in Canada, the people are not gonna do that, so they want benefits of being in Canada but, so they don't want to give back the values that Canada is offering.

For Ammar, choosing either the Canadian Muslim or Muslim Canadian label was tricky. He believed that, on the one hand, identifying as Canadian first implies that he accepts Canadian secular and pluralist values although they contradict with Islamic values. On the other hand, identifying as Muslim Canadian means he disrespects or denies the values of the Canadian society he lives in. All told though, he explained that if he were to indicate a preference, his Muslim identity is more dominant to his "Canadian" identity. Ammar's story shows that Canadian identity is considered more secular or areligious values rather than religious values. To put it differently, whereas Islam is considered as a component of ethnic/national identities where Muslims are majority, in minority Canadian context, Islam is not an integral element of Canadian identity for the participants.

All this data show that, the formation of Muslim identities and the interaction of these identities with the Canadian public sphere is a complex phenomenon rather than easily being

categorized as Canadian Muslim or Muslim Canadian. I also argue that even though Canadian scholars suggest there is more religious freedom in contemporary Canada, particularly when compared to the legal configurations secularism of America, France, and in the province of Québec (Beyer, 2008; Beaman, 2010; Tardif, 2012), the data from my study shows that one's religious freedom can be limited or inadequate to some extent and can challenge the maintenance of one's religious identity even within the freedom of Canada. Furthermore, it has been found that Muslim identity (as is also true for ethnic identity) is more significant than Canadian identity for the participants I interviewed. Based on this data, I claim that Canadian identity shaped by multi-national and multi-religious values is not considered as a part of religious identities of Muslims living in Canada. That is to say, Muslim identities is not integrated to Canadian identity. Muslim identities and ethnic identities that have emerged though faith, shared history of ancestors or blood relations are more dominant than Canadian identity that most of the Muslims living in Canada came across in the last few decades. To put it differently, as I mentioned in Chapter two, there were only approximately 3,000 Muslims in Canada in the 1950s (Zine, 2012:5). Similarly, all my participants also came to Canada after the 1950s. And also, Muslims in Canada are only 3.6% of the whole population in Canada, where public spheres mostly shaped by secular and pluralist values. Thus, Canadian identity is still both a recent phenomenon and has not integrated with Islamic traditions and culture as ethnic identities in Muslim majority countries have integrated historically.

4.4 Islamic sects and sectarianism in forming Muslim Identities in Canada

In their co-authored book *Diaspora by Design: Muslim Immigrants in Canada and Beyond,* Moghissi et al. describe the Canadian Muslim minority population as a heterogeneous

society with different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Throughout my fieldwork in the three aforementioned Canadian cities, I came across Muslims with 15 different ethnic origins. Despite this shared feature in their identities, they all differed in their opinions and approaches towards Islamic sects and sectarianism. As mentioned in Chapter Two, 65% of Muslim Canadians identify as Sunni, 15% as Shia, and 20% as neither (Environics, 2007). The sectarian separation among my sample of 55 interlocutors is not representative of the broader Canadian context as I was only able to conduct interviews with two self-identified Shias, both because I had little access to Shia Muslims, and those that I was able to reach were reluctant to participate since that do not want to participate anything religious. I believe that they have decided to get away from Islam because of the oppressive religious regime of Iran where majority of them originally come from. As seen in the chart below, 84% of my participants were Sunni, 4% were Shia, and 12% neither.

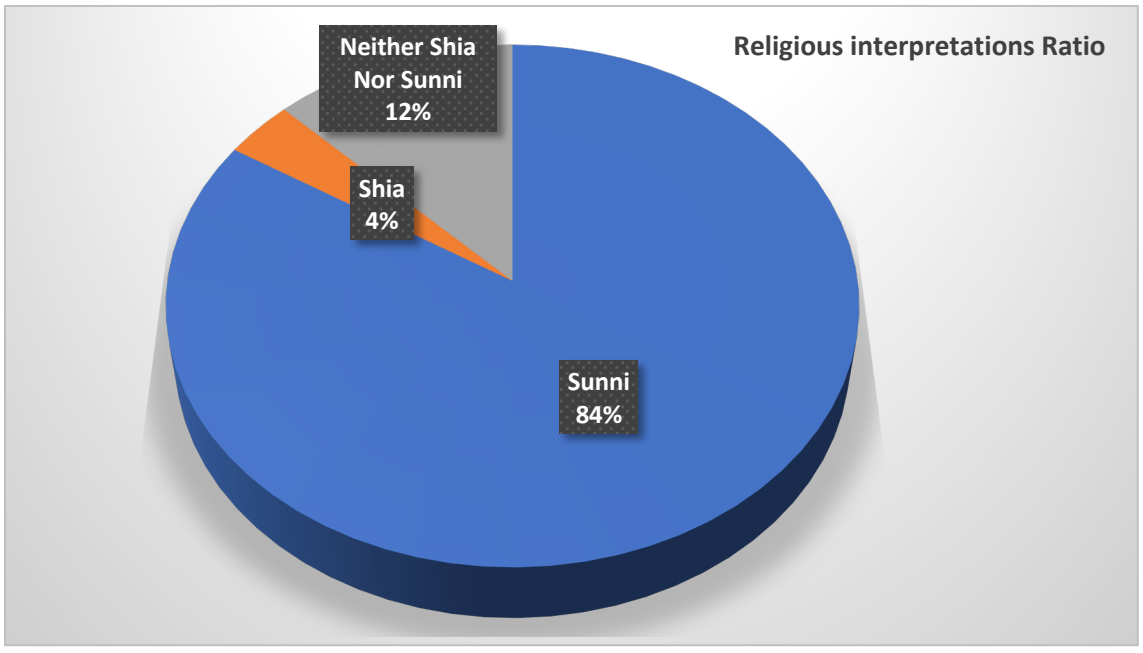

Figure 11:Sects and Sectarianism Ratio of the Participants

As a self-identified Muslim who hails from Turkey, where awareness of Islamic sects is very high and the majority of Muslims label themselves with either *Hanafi* or *Shafi* sects of Sunni Islam, I thought that Muslims in Canada would also identify with particular Islamic legal school sects. However, I found that the degree of belongingness to an Islamic sect, and the way participants approached Islamic sects were different.

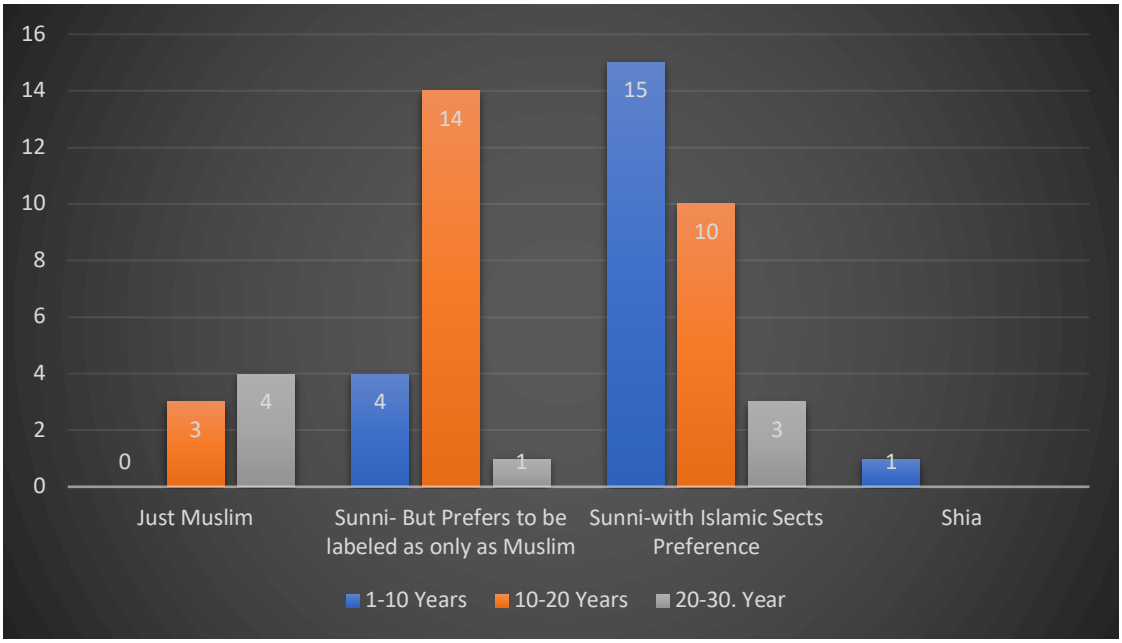

Figure 12:Islamic Legal Tradition Preferences Based on Years Spend in Canada

As seen in the graph above, only about 50% of my participants followed an Islamic sect (see fig. 13). The remaining 50% either believed that Islamic sects were not necessary, or simply did not know much about sects. 13% of them consider themselves as only "Just Muslim" without labeling with any Islamic sects or sectarian ideology. Even 40 % of my participants followed Sunni Islam, prefers to call themselves as "Just Muslims" rather than identifying themselves with any Islamic Sunni sects. The graph also shows that whereas Muslims who lives in Canada more than 10 years mostly consider themselves as "Just Muslims", those who are in Canada less than 10 years presents belongings to a Islamic sects. This shows that in the post-migration context of Canada diverse Muslim identities, shaped by Islamic sects and sectarian ideologies, died away.

Given that my data mostly based on Sunni participants, from a Sunni perspective I find this situation as problematic. It is not because of non-belonging to an Islamic sect is wrong but because my participants consider belonging to an Islamic sect means dividing Muslim societies. They think as being "Just Muslims" they protect Islam from any wrong thoughts. I argue that this perception on (Sunni) Islamic sects is inadequate because they do not know how the Islamic sects emerged. [21]

One participant, 46-year-old university professor Saad, a Canadian citizen with Bangladeshi origins, self-identified as Sunni practicing Muslim, explained his thoughts on Islamic sects as follows:

> Just Sunni, I would say. Because the madhhab does not make much difference. This is to emphasize that madhhab is not a religion, madhhab is a preference of how you are going to interpret whenever it is proper to interpret the verses of Quran and Sunnah. As most of the scholars within the madhhab say that if somebody gives an opinion and that is correct opinion, [then] that is my opinion. In fact, the Shaykhs say that; Imam [Abu] Hanifah, Malik and so on. So, I don't have a madhhab.

Saad was aware of Islamic sects, but he considered all the sects equal and did not find distinguishing further within Sunnism was important. When I furthered my conversation with Saad, I understood that he believed that his religious information was sufficient and that he did not need to follow any *shaikh* or *ulama* to practice Islam. For this reason, he did not follow them nor reject them.

[21] As I self-identified Muslims who born and raised in a Muslim majority country, historically, I know that (Sunni) Islamic sects has emerged as a daily need of Muslim societies depending on their life circumstances. . The occurrence of more than one Islamic sect is due to the different understanding of theoretical principles by sect-led imams. The imams of the Islamic sects did not disagree on the essences of Islam, but they differed in the details of Islam about in the way practiced. For example, all the imams agreed on cleansing the head with water in ablution is mandatory; they differed in the style and quantity water for rubbing the head.(Hasan, 2012)

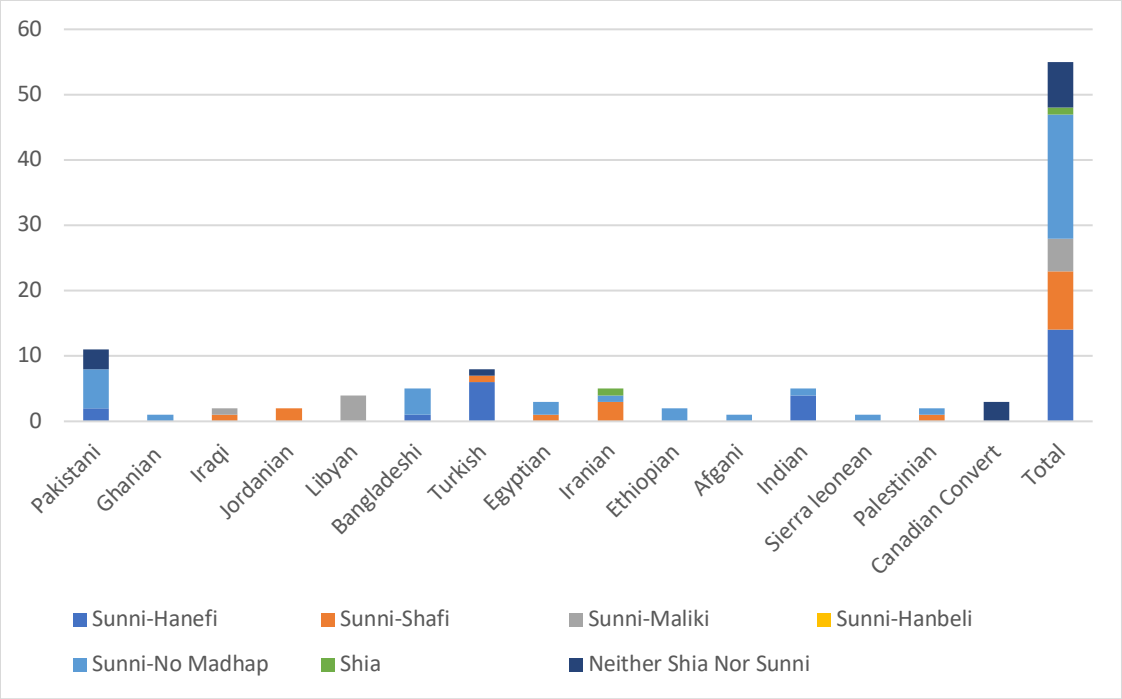

Figure 13:Islamic Sects and Sectarianism Preferences of Participants by numbers

As seen in the graph above, there is a diverse preference for religious interpretations among my participants and it seems to differ based on ethnic origins. We see that 35% follow Sunni sects without any *madhab* preferences, 25% were Sunni-Hanafi, 16% were Shia, 9% were Sunni Maliki, and 2% as Shia.[22] This data shows that Muslims in Canada are diverse and this situation also alter their sects and sectarianism preferences. Based on the data, I argue that Muslims in Canada are aware of sectarianism. Majority of Muslims in Canada follow Sunni Islam however they do not deny existences of Shia or call them as unbeliever as in Muslims in some Muslim majority countries (e.g. Saudi Arabia). Moreover, there is a mutual respect between Sunni and Shia Muslims living in Canada. Based on findings, it can be said that even though sectarian division is in important in describing Muslims identities in Canada, preferring a specific Islamic

[22] The word *madhab* in Arabic means 'the way of acting.' In religious terminology, it refers to the school of Islamic Jurisprudence based on interpretation of Hadiths (Islamic tradition) and sharia (Islamic law) that arose in the first 150 years of Islam. There are four widespread madhabs in Sunni Islam: Hanefi, Shafi, Maliki and Hanbeli. Whenever I use the word *madhab* or sect, I refer to these four Sunni schools of thought.

set is only still important for some Muslims living in Canada. It also demonstrates that Canadians with Turkish, Indian, Libyan, and Jordanian ethnic origins affiliate their religious identities with Islamic sects to a greater degree than Muslims with Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Ethiopian origins, as well as converted Muslims. Furthermore, the graphs highlight that 13% of the participants identify themselves as neither *Sunni* nor *Shia.* In this regard, 52-year-old social activist Aysha, who is a Canadian citizen with Pakistani origins living in Halifax answered when I asked:

> MB: How do you identify yourself religiously?
> Aysha: Muslim, I guess if you want to categorize it which I really don't like labels, I'm a Muslim slash or exclamation marks or whatever you want to call it, Sunni and I actually learned the difference of that just a few years ago in my life. (She grown up in Pakistan) Because my parents never raised me by differentiating me as a Muslim from any other Muslim. I learned as an adult.

According to Aysha, she did not receive Islamic education during her childhood. In fact, she called herself Muslim without actively practicing Islam. After she married, her husband became a source of religious information, which helped her to know more about Islam. She does not wear hijab, easily interacts with both genders, goes to mosques once each month, and sometimes observes daily prayers. For her, being human is above everything and she believes that Islam commands adherents to respect and help everyone without considering race, color, or religion. Having said so, I would like to share Aysha's experience with a non-Muslim homeless person in a mosque in Halifax:

> So that was at the beginning. As I said, I learned late in life [that] I'm a Sunni because that's not what my parents taught me to differentiate. It's to prevent negative PR, that's exactly what Mohammed, he felt that he needed to do this because there was so much misconception of what Muslims are because of the negative. All our families are afraid, but the thing is we're not doing anything wrong and if we support and defend each other and then more people come forward, we need non-Muslims on our side, we need to interact with them. So now like when we do good deeds, if I give a food to a homeless person or a coat or jacket but I told them on this like people ask me why you are doing

> this, I say oh but I'm Muslim and it's *eid al adha* and that's like your Christmas,[23] you know a great time of celebration. And we give gifts to one another, so we wanted to give the gifts to this community because we live here and want to give back. That impression you know that was on the street, a homeless man they were lined up to get food from street and I had clothes to give away. And one of them say you know I don't believe all that stuff they're saying about Muslims, Muslims are good people. This is a homeless man who saying it, maybe before you know, we could have been like suspicious. When we invite homeless to come to our mosque, they're afraid to come in because they don't know what to expect. [. . .] They were afraid to come in, this is the other homeless telling us of their friends why they did not make.

Among my participants, Aysha was not the only one who emphasized multicultural values and respect for people of other religions. Another participant, 34-year-old, Iranian PhD student Fatima moved in St. John's five years ago from Iran, who identified as a non-practicing Shia, said:

> I was more negative towards Sunni Muslims five years ago.[24]Not that I had a negative feeling towards them, but we didn't have any dealings with them because as you're Shi'a, the Shi'as are all together and Sunnis all together. But since I've come to Canada, I've got a lot of good friends from the Sunni community and I visited the mosque a couple of times and I talked to them. Nothing is different. There are some minor things that is different and that's why my idea is changed.

Similar to Fatima's story, my Sunni participants also confessed that they become more respectful to Shia values, even if they do not follow them, after they came to Canada. As a self-identified Muslims, I have been both in Shia dominant Iran and Sunni dominant Saudi Arabia. Similar to Fatima's confession, I have observed that Shias in Iran believe Sunnis' practices are wrong, and feed negative feelings towards Sunnis, and Sunnis in Saudi Arabia think Shias 'practices as wrong. In fact, some consider Shia as unbeliever. However, Shia and Sunni Muslims living in Canada interact with each other in public spheres blurred with secular and pluralist values and get chance to know each other practices more closely. Thus, I argue that Muslims from different sectarian groups living in Canada have more positive opinions towards each other. To put it differently, my findings show that religiously pluralist and multi-cultural atmosphere of Canada reshape Muslims views about sectarian and negative thoughts towards each other.

[23] Here she talks about her conversation with homeless man, namely "your" refers to the homeless man.
[24] She was in Iran five years ago.

.
22-year-old Afghani Zahra in Halifax explained:

> I believe in God; I am a Muslim. Whether somebody is Sunni, Shia or Ahmadi I am not judging. I am strongly believing the most important thing for Muslims is [how do they] to behave, treat the people. You like good things for yourself and the others should be aware of that you desire the same good things for them as well. Religion is a personal belief. We shouldn't divide people religiously.

Another participant from Halifax, 22-year-old Doa, who does not identify as either Shia or Sunni and whose both father and mother are originally from Pakistan pointed out:

> My father is actually Shia and my mom is Sunni, so I never had that issue in our family I think again that diversity within Islam is very healthy. It is nice to meet people who have different point of views and recognize and share experience that we have together and the shared values that we have despite maybe different labels. I don't know, as we do Sunni, we also read Sufi books, again and like I attend Muharram ceremonies as well as Shia does. We are very open as a family, so I don't really affiliate myself with one community.

After having the above conversations with these participants, I came to believe that living in the multinational and religiously diverse Canadian society also influences Muslims' views on Islamic sects and sectarianism. These participants' opinions towards different interpretations of Islam have changed after living in Canada more than five years. They believed that they should respect Islamic interpretations which are different than their own and refrain from judging or criticizing them. Though mutual respect and understanding of each other's Islamic inclinations evidently exists in Canada, does not mean that there is no sectarian preference among other Muslims practicing their faith in Canada. The graph below highlights to what extent and on what grounds Muslims living in Canada accept different religious interpretations (see fig.13):

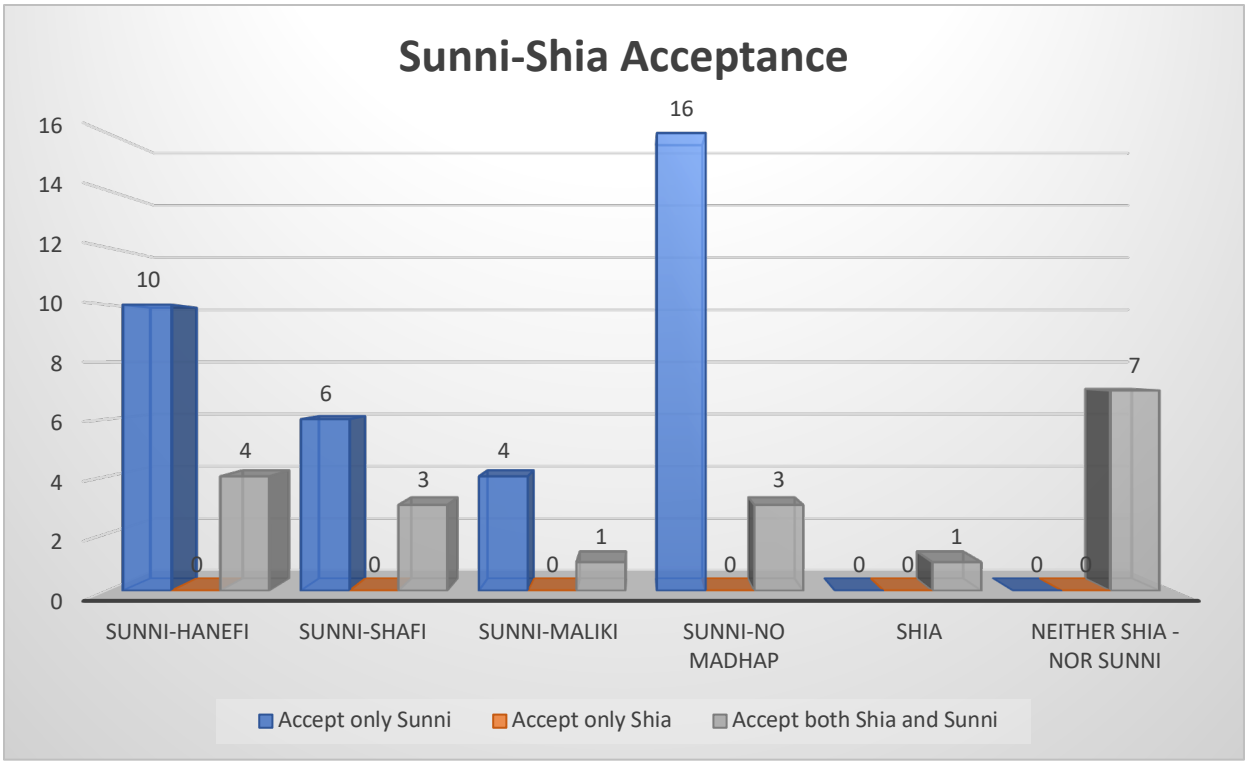

Figure 14: Shia-Sunni acceptance of the participants based on Islamic sects and sectarianism preferences

The graph demonstrates that the participants who belonged to Sunni-sects primarily accepted other Sunni interpretations, while the participants who identified themselves as neither Shia nor Sunni accepted both Sunni and Shia interpretations. In other words, 77% of Sunni participants accepted Sunni interpretations and 23% of them accepted both Shia and Sunni interpretations. 100% of participants who did not consider themselves Shia or Sunni accepted both Shia and Sunni interpretations, but Sunni-identifying participants did not find Shia legal interpretations acceptable.

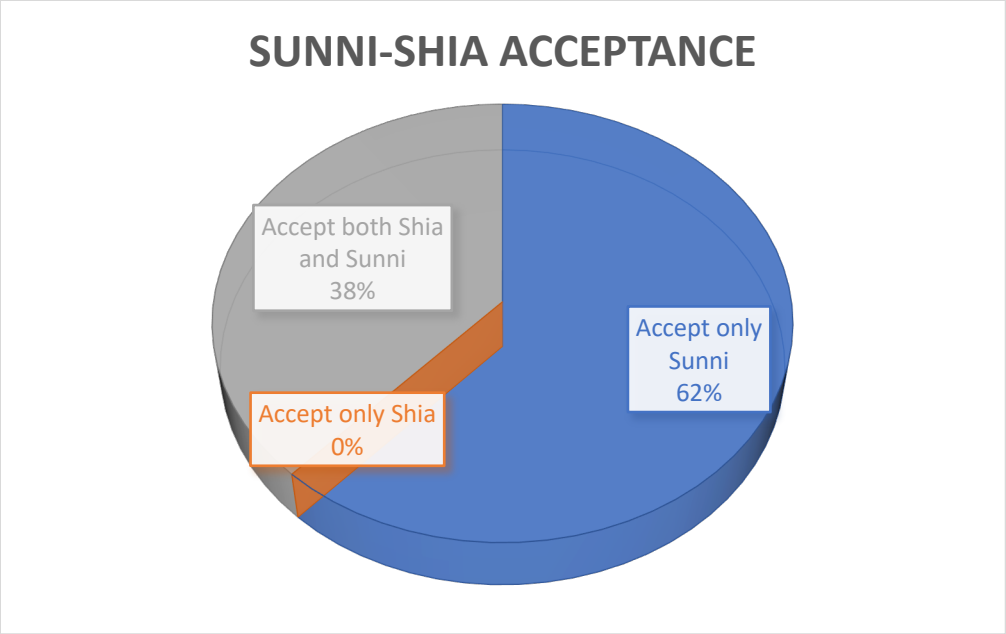

Figure 15:Shia-Sunni Acceptance among all the participants

The chart shows that two-thirds of participants accepted *only* Sunni interpretations, and one third of participants accepted both Shia and Sunni interpretations. That is to say, while 100% of participants accepted Sunni interpretations, only 38% of participants accepted Shia interpretations. Based on this data, I argue that there is a Sunni dominance among Canadian Muslims. Even though, my observation about Shia Muslims in Canada was limited, I claim that whereas Shia Muslims in Canada consider Sunni legal interpretations as acceptable which is not the case in the example of Iran I mentioned earlier, Majority of Sunni Muslims in Canada do not consider Shia legal interpretations as acceptable similar to Muslims in Sunni majority Saudi Arabia.

Another important point, I discovered in my study was the role of Islamic legal traditions in forming religious identities of Canadian convert Muslims. During my fieldwork in Halifax, I also met and conducted interviews with three converted Muslims whose opinions concerning how Islamic sects and sectarianism differ from most. As seen in figures 13 and 14, they describe themselves as neither Shia nor Sunni. They accepted both Shia and Sunni interpretations, and

none of them have lived in a Muslim majority country at any point. Given that they learned and practiced Islam in Canada, where pluralist and secular values discourage sectarian ideas in a Muslim minority context, they had limited interaction with different Islamic interpretations. One of them was a 35-years-old optical clinic staff member named Mary. She converted to Islam ten years ago and married a Muslim man. When I asked her whether is she affiliates herself with any Islamic sects, she said:

> If I had to be, I guess I could be Sunni, I don't know. But I am not aware of a lot of these distinctions, and just because that I am within Sunni doesn't mean that I wouldn't be friends with somebody who is Shia or anything like that. To be it is just Muslim.

It is evident that Mary did not know much concerning sectarianism and Islamic sects. As our conversation continued, I learned that had she only heard the terms Shia and Sunni terms in passing, as was not aware of how their interpretations differed. Both Internet and her husband were the sources of religious authority. Her husband also was not identifying himself as Sunni or Shia Muslims even though he was from Bangladesh were Muslins historically are *hanafi*. In fact, it was during our interview in Halifax that she realized for the first time that there are also sects within Sunni Islam. Similar to Mary, a converted Muslim in Halifax, John, 35 years old, mentioned his unfamiliarity with sectarianism and Islamic sects. He said, "That's not my background, I really do not make any association." John converted to Islam 13 years ago. He revealed that since he converted to Islam, he has been going to mosque regularly. When I asked whether the mosque, he attends follows Sunni-Islam or Shia Islam, he said "It is a just a Muslim mosque." After we talked more about how attendees pray in his mosque, and the differences between Shia and Sunni practices during the prayer, he remarked, "With that respect, I think it throws me in the Sunni camp, but I do not particularly say one or another."

Both Mary's and John's stories highlight that converted Muslims have more generalized Muslim identities without reference to Islamic sects and sectarianism. Moreover, Muslims who come to Canada from Muslim majority countries are more familiar with the different religious interpretations and apparently did not make known these differences to converted Muslims. However, given that the majority of Muslims in Canada are Sunni and most mosques follow Sunni Islam, Canadian converted Muslims are most likely to practice Sunni Islam without being aware of it and without identifying themselves as such.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the place offline spaces occupies in shaping the religious identities of Muslims living in the socio-religious context of Canada. I particularly focused on the role of Islamic sects and sectarianism for Muslims living in Canada, their ethnic and religious preferences and inter Muslim relations in the post-migration context of Canada. I also examined Canadian Muslim converts awareness of the diversity of Islamic legal traditions and the sectarianism and Islamic sects' role in forming their Canadian Muslim identities. Throughout participant observation and interviews during my fieldwork in St. John's, Halifax and Mississauga, I found that Muslims living in Canada creates their own religious zones through mosques, *musallas* where they both practice their religious identities and socialize with each other. I also found that the number of Muslim populations in these cities and the accessibility of Islamic spaces shape the degree of Muslims' interactions and socializing with each other in mosques and other Islamic centers. In contrast, in smaller cities such as in St. John's, Muslims have more individualistic Muslim identities, and practice Islam in more private spaces. That is to say, the Internet is major sources for their religious engagements and is more important for their

faith. However, in larger cities like Mississauga and Halifax there are more dynamic and active Muslim communities that help support practicing Muslim identities.

My findings also highlighted that whereas majority of Muslims living in Canada consider being Canadian as an element of their identities, some still only label themselves with their ethnic and Muslim identities even though they may have permanent status. I also discovered that even though Muslims choked back with pluralist and secular values to have sectarian views and act in Canadian public spheres and become more respectful towards sectarian differences, majority of Muslims living in Canada only accept Sunni legal interpretations as correct. I also explored that whereas Islamic sects are crucial elements of religious identities of Muslims living in Canada, their role in shaping Muslim identities have been diminishing in post-migration context. I also found that convert Muslims in Canada are not aware of Islamic legal traditions. Given that they mostly studied at Canadian public schools, they do not learn Islamic legal traditions in the school environments. Moreover, in other Islamic spaces, the different Islamic sects and sectarianism are not pronounced with the fear that whoever mention them is called schismatic in Canadian society. Thus, Islamic sects and sectarianism do not have a signification role for convert Muslims in the formation of their Muslim identities.

Chapter 5: Muslim Identities Online in Canada

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how online spaces impact the identity formation of Muslims who live in Canada. It particularly focuses on the role of cyberspaces and online interactions in the everyday religious practices of my participants. I investigate these spaces in two ways: firstly, by examining my participants' concern and usage of the Internet in shaping Islamic practices, beliefs, values and attitudes in their daily lives. Secondly, I explore the online interactions of my participants concerning online communities and their gender preferences.

5.2 Participants' perception of the Internet in their everyday religious practices

As I discussed in Chapter Two, "cyber Islamic environments" have been emerging as a networking means for religious sources and discussions for Muslims and taking part in shaping their identities (Bunt, 2003; Anderson, 2003; Ramji, 2014). Throughout my qualitative research in St. John's, Halifax and Mississauga, I found that my participants engaged in online spaces to varying degrees for their religious needs in a Canadian Muslim minority context.

Perhaps the most obvious finding from my interviews is that all of my participants revealed that the Internet plays a crucial role in providing them easy and fast access to Islamic information and religious sources which otherwise would not be accessible, given that they have limited access to physical books and Islamic scholars. Among my participants, I found diverse perspectives on the momentousness of the Internet for their everyday religious lives, especially depending on where they are living. Geography therefore matters.

1. St. John's

As mentioned in Chapter Four, there is only one mosque in the capital city of Newfoundland and Labrador, the *Masjid-an-Noor,* which is outside of St. John's and only accessible by car. The director and the executive members of the Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador prefer to adopt what I see as a more passive presence in the pluralist and secular public domain, as the community there is quite small, even relative to mid-sized cities like Mississauga and Halifax. As a result, it has not had an official since it was built, so Muslims in St. John's have had no official full-time Islamic authorities from whom to seek religious information. In this particular context, all the participants in St. John's expressed that the Internet has become the most noteworthy means by which to learn more about and practice Islam.

To explain this further, I turn to my participant, 49-year-old Heba, who identifies as a 'moderate' Muslim. Heba was born in Egypt and grew up in Kuwait and has been living in Canada for 20 years. She mentioned that when she was in Kuwait, imams and Islamic scholars were always available if she had a question to ask, had a topic to discuss, or wished to learn more about Islam. However, in St. John's, her physical access to Islamic studies has been limited to occasional women's gatherings or when a religious figure comes from outside of the St. John's to give a speech in the mosque (which takes place almost twice a year). On the other hand, the Internet provides her with direct access to Islamic knowledge. I asked Heba what she thinks about her experience with the Internet and digital technologies as a Muslim living in Canada. She said:

> [The] Internet is my main source of information in here. Actually [. . .] a lot of most of my religious information I get is from [the] Internet. Like if I want to - let's say, like, I want to pray *salath-ul hajat* (prayer of need) you know, pray, and I want specific draw, I

> just go and look on the Internet. I did not go to the books like the box just go to research for this draw through the Internet and just in two seconds I have it. It's faster.

As we continued our conversation, Heba mentioned that she also uses the Internet and other digital technologies for her day-to-day religious needs. Given that there is no shop in St. John's selling Islamic clothing and books, she instead purchases headscarves for her and her daughter online. When they need an Islamic book, they buy it from the Internet. In order to learn daily prayer times, follow her daily *adhkar,* and determine whether a food is halal or haram, she uses mobile apps in her phone such as *Muslim Pro, Scan Halal,* and *Quran Majeed.* [25]She also noted that the Internet functions as a means to connect with her relatives and friends.

Participants also noted another important use of online spaces: to check the authenticity of religious information and practices in St. John's, where the absence of imams and religious scholars exist. To elaborate on this, I return to my conversation with Heba, she remarked:

> That thing [the Internet] is very useful, very useful, but *fiqh* like if sometimes, like we feel afraid if this right or wrong, we just go to the Internet and make sure that we are on good way, in the right path if we don't have like someone to ask it's very important.

Throughout the interviews I conducted in St. John's, I heard similar expressions from other participants in that they also considered cyberspaces to be indispensable for their religious life in the city. Their experiences demonstrate that the Internet is one of the most important factors in fostering Muslim identities in the absence of strong Islamic communities and offline religious sources in the religiously diverse and putatively secular public that is St. John's, where the Muslim population is considerably small.

[25] *Adhkar* refers to devotional acts, primarily in Sufi Islam, in which short phrases or prayers are repeatedly recited silently or aloud.

2. *Mississauga, Ontario*

The largest Muslim populated cities in Canada per capita are respectively Mississauga, at 14% of the overall population, and Toronto, at 7.7% of the city's population (Statistics Canada. 2013). In general, based on my participants in these two cities, I observed that the influence of online spaces with the participants vary based on their offline engagements and disengagements with the local Muslim communities in these two cities. Given that the Muslim populations in Mississauga and Toronto are far more dense -the two cities combined have over 40 official mosques - it is easier for Canadian Muslims to participate in a local Muslim community. As I described in the previous chapter, one of these centres was the masjid of Anatolian Islamic Centre in Mississauga. Whereas the mosque in St. John's does not have an official imam, this masjid has three full-time imams and one volunteer community leader. Also, in contrast to the smaller city of St. John's and its MANAL, there has been an active religious community engagement in the center as pointed earlier at Chapter Four.

In this context, similar to Heba's responses, I also asked six participants in the center their opinion about how they consider the Internet and digital technologies as a Muslim living in Canada. One of them, was an 18-year-old university student named Hatice. She came from Turkey and arrived in Canada 9 years ago with her mom and elder brother after her father passed away. They have relatives from her mother's side living in Canada. Since their arrival, she has been participating in Muslim activities and events with her aunt. She wears a headscarf and has done so since she was 12 years old, when she also began actively practicing Islam. She was very wary of the religious authority of Islamic sources. She said:

> I don't trust online when it comes to my religious because there's a lot of bad impact like they don't show my religion the way it is offline but online it's horrible, so I don't trust

> any online resources…I think I usually trust offline like offline like people face to face not like [a] website.

Then, I asked her about the importance of online spaces when it is compared with offline spaces for her religious life, she mentioned that religious leaders, religious texts, her parents, siblings, other relatives, friends and printed media are more important than the Internet.

From Hatice's narrative, we learn that Muslims who have the opportunity to reach actual imams or religious scholars in person tend to discuss Islam in offline spaces rather than seeking these spaces online. She and three other women that I interviewed indicated that their Muslim identities were shaped by the religious environment in the centre. They do not have confidence in online spaces and believe that for them it is difficult to figure out the authenticity of Islamic resources online. Nevertheless, they watch YouTube videos of famous Muslim figures such as Mufti Menk, Numan Ali Khan and Zakir Naik, whom they have heard from members of their community as trustworthy sources for Islamic learning.[26] They believe that even though they learn from the Internet, it does not affect their religious practices and faith as the center does. They see online spaces as a distraction rather than as enhancing their faith.

Apart from Muslims in the community centre, I also asked for expressions of online spaces from Muslims who can be described as cultural Muslim rather than practicing Muslims. They do not belong to offline or online Muslim communities. To elaborate their experiences with online spaces further, I return to the mortgage broker Ferit's story from Chapter Four. For Ferit, the Internet is a great source that connects him with his family and friends. He considers the

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[26] Mufti Menk is a 44-year-old Muslim scholar and Grand Mufti of Zimbabwe.
Nouman Ali Khan is a 41-year-old American Muslim speaker and Arabic instructor. He founded the online Islamic platform 'the Bayyinah Institute for Arabic and Qur'anic Studies' in 2005.
Zakir Naik is a 53-year-old Indian Muslim speaker. He founded the online Islamic platforms, Islamic Research Foundation and Peace TV.

Internet a very crucial aspect of his personal life (e.g. communication with his family, shopping online) since he heavily uses Internet for his work, to shop online and communicate with businessmen in China. However, he remarked that he does not use the Internet for any religious purposes, such as reading the Qur'an online, hadith and other Islamic jurisprudence. He considers that the Internet neither enhances not distracts his faith. Ferit was the only non-practicing Muslim I interviewed in Mississauga, but there were three more Muslims in Halifax who like Ferit expressed that they do not religiously participate online in any way. In fact, they consider that the Internet has no effect for their religious lives and Muslim identities.

3. Halifax, Nova Scotia

There is an estimated 8,505 Muslims living in Halifax (Census, 2011). The Muslim population in Halifax is less than that of Toronto and Mississauga, but more than that of St. John's, and I found that Halifax was home to very active and diverse Muslim communities. As a result, I was able to meet with Muslims who had different experiences and concerns about the Internet and digital technologies. Three female university student participants highlighted that the Internet helps them to maintain their practicing Muslim identities in Canadian public spheres. To further on this, I turn to the story of 21-year-old university student, Aya. She was born in Canada but has Libyan origins. Aya considers herself a practicing Muslim. She actively uses the Internet for religious purposes, including reading Qur'an online, searching for a hadith or an Islamic fiqh, and watching Islamic lectures on social media. She thinks that the Internet enhances her faith. She explained:

> Living in a Western country, some things can be difficult like wearing hijab and stuff like that or fasting. But then first of all I have friends or Muslim but also when you see people online who have the same troubles, you can relate to one another and you can feel sort of support our like community. It makes me more enthusiastic about it as I've gotten older,

> just knowing and especially on Twitter like seeing them mostly on Twitter which is in general pretty nice, it makes it feel like more of a community, it makes me feel more enthusiastic about practicing religion even though it can be difficult sometimes here in Canada. Whenever I just have a specific question like I said I'll try to find all the different interpretations for all the different madhabs. I followed like a couple of sheikhs on Twitter. I follow a Shia Sheikh, he's really good I actually didn't know he was Shia till yesterday.

Aya's story demonstrates that Muslims, especially female youths, can feel uncomfortable with their Muslim identities in mainstream Canadian public spheres from time to time. During these periods, online spaces provide them with a sense of solidarity, and encourage them to practice their religious identities in Canadian society despite blurring with pluralist and secular values.

Throughout my qualitative research in Halifax, one of my most remarkable interviews concerning the Internet was with 40-year-old imam, Suleiman. He grew up in Sierra Leone and other neighbouring countries in West Africa. He had lived in Canada for 17 years. Suleiman has had both negative and positive thoughts on Internet for Muslim life. He said:

> Well, [the] Internet is not impacting my belief, because my belief is not changing. It is impacting my knowledge of what is being said about my religion. It is also impacting my knowledge about what other people are saying because being in the position that I have an Islamic education background, so sometimes I see answers from other scholars about the questions that maybe asked, or that I have. So, it is increasing my knowledge in some way[s].…It doesn't change my faith. But it definitely enhances my faith. It sometimes operates as a distraction, but it does not change my faith… it is also handy. So, if I want to check, for example, a saying of the prophetic hadith, sometimes there are websites that you can go to and authenticate certain sayings.

Suleiman highlights in this passage (as did many other participants) the practicality of online spaces for accessing Islamic information. Contrary to Hatice, who believes it is difficult to determine which website provides correct religious information, Suleiman reported that he benefits from the Internet to authenticate religiously based information. Given that he has Islamic training, it is easier for him to figure out whether a website is authentic or not. He mentioned that he looks at sources of hadith in the website, used language and scholars/people running the

website to decide whether an Islamic website is authentic or not. Suleiman also commented on how the Internet and digital technologies also may also be destructive for practicing Muslim identities. He remarked:

> I think it is becoming too addictive, and it is taking place of things that it should not take place of, such as direct interaction, and worship, and concentration, and presence. So it has a lot of negative effect as well. People come to the Mosque and sometimes instead of listening, which they have come for, they take their cellphones out. Those are very negative influences on the relationship between themselves, their worship and their religion, and the leaders of the Mosque, and the Internet. So, those kinds of things. Otherwise, some people use it for the right causes, they are explaining that, creating the understanding of that. That's very good.

During my fieldwork in Halifax, I heard similar testimonies from my participants. Even though almost all of them espouse the positive sides of the Internet for their religious practices, they also accepted that, sometimes, they waste a lot of time online, rather than using it pragmatically.

The participants in Halifax also expressed that they have experienced Islamophobia in online spaces. To further on this point, I return to Aya. Although Aya believes the Internet is very constructive for her Muslim identity, she also mentioned that she has been exposed to Islamophobia when she made post about her ideas concerning wearing hijab on Facebook. After she posted, she received many positive comments, even from non-Muslims, but there were also a few responses containing very bad language, which insulted her and other Muslims in Canada. She pointed out that, until that day, she had not experienced Islamophobia in any offline space despite living her whole life in Canada.

Like in Mississauga, I also interviewed Muslims either belonging to religious communities or regularly participating in their activities while I was in Halifax. For these participants, their local mosques and their imams are the most important sources for Islamic knowledge. They prefer to ask their religious questions to their imams face-to-face to imams and access the knowledge of other Islamic scholars through their imams. They all mentioned that

they mostly use the Internet for their professional lives and studies rather than for religious purposes. They did endorse the belief that the Internet is influencing their Muslim identities even though they use it and other digital technologies for practical reasons, such as learning daily prayer times, reading Qur'an, and to find the location of a mosque.

To this end, my findings in this research is similar to Ramji's qualitative study on second generation Canadian Muslims identities in Canada (2014). Like her, I found that that online spaces seem to provide easy access to Islamic information when it is otherwise not possible in the Canadian context. For my participants, the Internet functions as a "a tool to promote religious practice" (2005) and as "an information space" (2004: 212).

5.3 Participants' Online Religious Interactions

In this section, I examined how my participants practiced their Muslim identities in cyber Islamic spaces through online interaction with each other. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Bunt (2003) argues that for Muslims online spaces reveal, transform, and reinforce their religious beliefs, societies and identities. In doing so, he indicates that the Internet is an important network for Muslims for knowledge transmission and to express their religious identities. Likewise, my findings from the interviews I conducted with 55 self-identified Muslims throughout my fieldwork in Canada showed that Muslims interacted online to share their experiences, inform each other about Muslim events and activities, and mobilize their gatherings and connect them to their Muslim friends and families both in Canada and in other places.

I have observed that there was a significant gap in participants over the age of 40. Participants whose ages are above 40 years old were very limited. However, I discovered that online interactions the younger generation of Muslims interact with each other online more regularly, and often discuss issues concerning Muslims and Islam. To elaborate, recall the story

of my Iranian friend's son, a university student in Mississauga, named Rafiq. He was born in Iran and raised in Qatar. He has been living in Canada with his family since 2015. He remarked how online spaces influenced his Muslim identity as follows:

> Well, as like I told you like before like watching these religious talks, I was thinking like everyone should become a Muslim, I should make everyone in Muslim but right now I'm thinking like religion or Islam is something that the person should feel within inside them, you cannot force them.

In this passage, Rafiq demonstrates how the Internet helped him become more moderate in his faith. Before he got into watching religious talks online, he was really strict in how he interpreted his beliefs. However, after engaging in these online spaces he says, in his terms, "I'm not very strict, I'm [a] moderate Muslim". He further mentioned that the Internet is very important for him to communicate with his friends in Qatar and Iran, He says even with his friends in Canada, he mostly contacts them through the Internet. Whereas Iran is a Shia majority country, Rafiq and his family follow Sunni Islam. In fact, this was one of the important reasons that they believe that they can practice their Sunni Muslim identities in a better way and build a future for them in Canada which is not possible as a Sunni Muslim in Iran. Rafiq is member for online Islamic groups from his home country. But even though he has both Sunni and Shia friends, online communities to which he belongs only consist of Sunni people. When I asked him why he does not have Shia friends in their online group. He said "Well, some stuff that I like they do not like, that's why like we're not in the same groups online with Shia people." He also believes that online communities offer better opportunities that might be difficult otherwise. He said:

> You need to ask a question and that question is some Muslims don't like that questions to be asked, that's why if you are on online you can do that anonymously without anyone knowing who you are, or you can't get the answer

As Rafiq highlighted above, my other participants, particularly the younger ones, also pointed out that the Internet helps them to ask their Islamic questions online regarding private matters

such as sexuality, interactions with opposite gender and family members. They mainly use the following websites for their questions: islamqa.info/en, imamsonline.com and islamicsupremecouncil.com. As our conversation went on, Rafiq also mentioned his activities on a Muslim group on Facebook. He stated:

> Like when I was near to Canada I was part of this page in Facebook and we used to like translates like videos from Persian to English and used have like around 5000 followers on Facebook and we used to like share it with them like teach them about the good side of Islam.

Rafiq's account shows that he feels responsible for presenting Islam online in a good manner. Social media provides him a platform that he can share his religious thoughts and reach out to a larger society. Similar to Rafiq, 22-year-old university student, Naima actively interacts online for religious purposes. She was born and raised in Halifax; her parents migrated there 35 years ago from Afghanistan. She mentioned that her views about Islam and Canadian society have changed after leaving an Islamic school and moving to a more public-school setting. She stated:

> I think in some places it's very obvious that most Islamic doctrines are homophobic but for me I don't. I am not going be a homophobic person, I am not going to judge them based on their sexuality. Like as I said before, I am a Muslim and I believe the only one that can judge people is Allah not me. I cannot go and judge someone's experiences and living. For us, if I care about my Islamophobia and different group says this is happening to me, we say like no, this is not a big problem.

As the passage above highlights and our conversation with Naima went on, I understood that Naima's conservative Muslim identity transformed into a liberal Muslim identity when she encountered pluralist and putatively secular spheres in the Canadian public-school systems. She indicated that the more she became liberal the more actively she engaged with online spaces to combat Islamophobia and homophobia. The Internet provides her an opportunity to practice her liberal Muslim identity openly. She explained:

> I contribute online a lot. So, I comment, share, post all my staff online is public. Anyone whether they are my friend or not can share, comment my posts, do whatever on

> Facebook and twitter. On social media, I engage more advocating for Muslim women and advocating for against Islamophobia. You know, just supporting to other Muslims online that dealing with Islamophobia. It's nice to give support to Muslims all across. …We also have a Facebook group. We discuss mostly on wearing hijab and islamophobia

Naima's story demonstrates that there are Muslim identities that braided both secular and religious identities in online spaces (Orsi, 2005). Naima both combats Islamophobia--namely to support Muslim's values, and homophobia--namely an advocate to secular values in online groups on social media settings.

I have also observed that converts also dynamically interacted online with Muslims both in Canada and other countries. To explore their online experiences and interaction further, I start with the story of 37 years old self-identified convert Muslim Emma, in Halifax. Emma decided to be Muslim 12 years ago, while she was in a spiritual search. She describes her engagement with Internet as "I have been using Internet for Islamic resources and also to reach out and feel like I am part of the Muslim community." She first met her husband over the Internet. As they continued to chat online, I got to know each other more closely. Then, their relationship moved offline and they soon were married. She also mentioned that she got a lot of friends over the Internet as well. She states:

> I found in a different niche online my Muslim community, an opportunity to make friends, or an opportunity to discuss something that one of the groups might feel opposed to or whatever. I come from a pretty liberal background, so some of the more hardline Muslim ideas are not so comfortable. So, when I find people who are educated and in counter to those views, then that make me feel whole lot comfortable…. we mainly just supporting each other. Share the live streams to our group. Even not in Halifax, but in Saudi Arabia where if they are doing like *Fajr* prayer [in] Mecca, will share that into the group as well, and then share authentic hadith.

In this passage Emma finds relief and support for her identity struggle by interacting with other Muslims online. It is seen that through her online interactions, she learns more about Islam. Even

though she has not been to Mecca, she finds the opportunity to watch prayers from there to be exciting.

My findings also show that Muslims use online spaces to organize their offline activities and inform each other about them. For instance, as I examined in Chapter Four, students at MUN in St. John's have an online group on the *Viber* app to pray together during prayer times in the mobile musalla at the MUN library. Namely, they use the Internet as a means of mobilization to practice Islam. To elaborate on online-offline space engagement, I return to the story of Derya at the Anatolia Turkish Center. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, she is an active member of the center and she always volunteers for the events. During my conversation with her, she mentioned they discuss online when they want to organize an Islamic event for the sisters. Then, she described their last online group discussion:

> We have a *WhatsApp* group for volunteer sisters in the centre. One months before the winter break of the schools. *Emine teyze* (aunt) suggest having a winter camp for the girls in the center. Then we had a group discussion on WhatsApp. Everybody shared their opinions and what they could do for the winter camp. In this group we decided how long the winter camp would be, who will be responsible for what. And what activities will be included in the camp. Then, we announced the winter camp on our center's website and social media accounts to invite other sisters.

Derya's statement shows that Muslims engagement with online spaces provides them the opportunity to practice their religious identities in a more organized way. I have observed that most of my participants have groups on mobile apps *Viber* and *WhatsApp* with their Muslim friends and families. In these online groups, they sometimes ask a question and others respond to it; sometimes they share a Qur'an recitation or a lecture; sometimes they post a photo with a Qur'anic verse or Hadith on it; or sometimes invite each other for a coffee or to inform them of an Islamic event.

During my interviews, I also questioned how important gender was in the online and offline interactions of my participants. The charts below show gender preferences of my participants both in online and offline spaces (see fig.16)

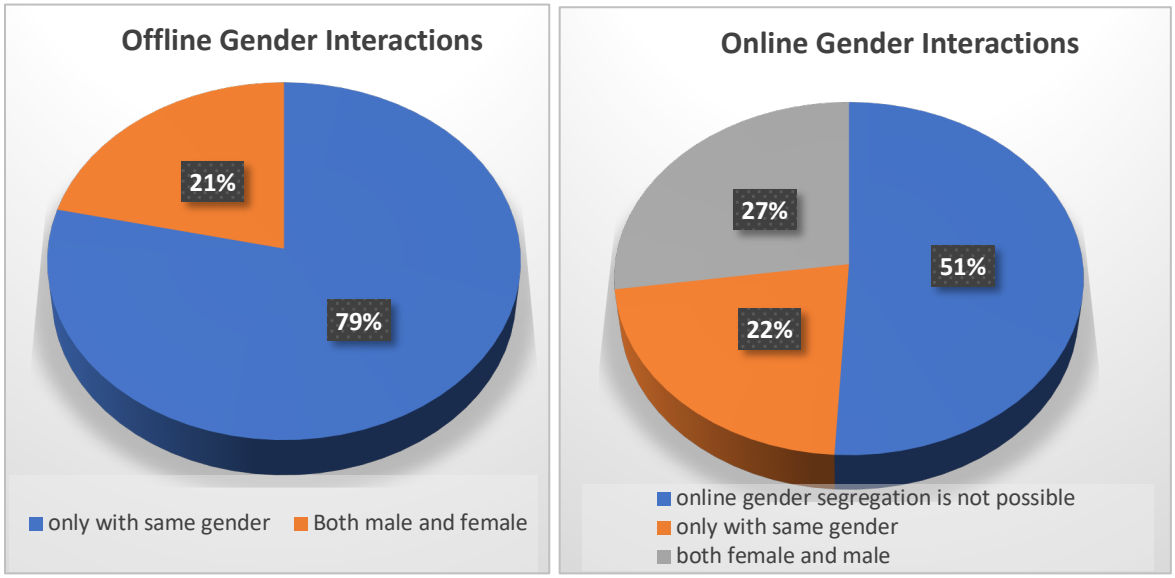

Figure 16:Gender interactions of the participants in online and offline settings

As is demonstrated in the charts, whereas most of the participants preferred to socialize/interact with the same gender in offline contexts (79%), the majority of them interacted with both females and males in online settings (7%3). In fact, 51% of the participants believed that it would not be possible to have online gender segregation. That is to say, while gender is an important component for the majority of participants for their Muslim identities in offline settings, gender has a trivial role for online Muslim identities.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the role of online spaces in shaping Muslim identities in the socio-religious context of Canada. I found that Muslims' engagements with online spaces facilities practicing their Muslim identities in Canadian offline spaces. I also found that Internet

creates a socio-religious zone to interact and act as a source of Islamic information for Muslims in the absence of offline spaces in Canada. Moreover, I discovered that Muslims in Canada mostly use Internet for pragmatic reasons such as having easy and fast access to religious information, organizing and advertising offline Islamic events and communicating with Muslims both in Canada and other places. Furthermore, I also discovered that belonging to an offline Muslim community in Canada shapes the engagements of Muslims with online spaces. To put it differently, they consider offline spaces more important than online spaces for their Muslim identities even if they use online spaces in one way or another. Lastly, I figured out that a vast majority of the Muslims I interviewed believe that there is no need for gender segregation in online spaces even though they think it is necessary in offline spaces.

Chapter 6: General Conclusions

I began this study describing how my earlier experiences with Muslims in St. John's led me to think that Muslim identities post-migration become weaker and that many of my participants were shifting from practicing Muslim identities towards cultural Muslim identities. Having now concluded my research, I realize that whereas some of my interlocutors navigate, negotiate, and accommodate their religious identities and create their own online and offline religious zones to practice Islam in the Canadian public sphere, others religiously disengage with both online and offline spaces, and thus, their Muslim identities become transformed into "cultural Muslim" ones in Canadian society. In this conclusion, I make four arguments: first, I show the role of sectarianism and Islamic sects in the formation Muslim identities of my participants; second, I consider how Canadian convert Muslims' knowledge of Islamic legal traditions is worthy of our scholarly attention; third, that I point to how we must pay attention to the "Just Muslim" response of my participants in describing their Muslim identities; and fourth, I demonstrate that Islamophobia impacts of online spaces and the offline Islamic practices of my participants.

In the first place, I discovered through the 55 interviews I conducted with self-identified Muslims in St. John's, Halifax and Mississauga that my participants' approach to Islamic sects and sectarian differences in the Canadian public sphere is predominantly tolerant and respectful. Even though the majority of the participants in this study practice and accept only Sunni-Islam doctrines, when asked, they remarked that they respect and do not deny Shia Islam. Also, significant, my findings showed that the majority of my participants do not differentiate between or follow any specific sect (*madhab*) within Sunni Islam. I found that many newcomer Muslims develop pluralist and secular values (which they may have held pre-migration too). While my

data is not longitudinal, I see how, in general, my participants described becoming more open and respectful of ethnic, social, and religious differences as they become increasingly enmeshed within life in Canada. They consider that describing their Muslim identities with reference to a particular Islamic legal tradition either redundant or improper in Canada where the state is committed to human rights, equality and religious freedom. However, this situation may lead to diminishment of religious pluralism among Muslims living in Canada who originally come from diverse ethnic, cultural societies and historically follow different Islamic legal traditions. To put it differently, my participants often described themselves "Just Muslim" without relating their Muslim identities with any Islamic sects and/or sectarian ideology. I see how a pluralist political context in Canada that may thus inadvertently serve Wahhabi perceptions of Islam.

In the second place, and related to my first finding, I found that the converts in this study were not aware of Islamic legal traditions. This lack of knowledge can be explained by the fact that they had always lived in the Muslim minority context of Canada where they had limited interactions with Islamic sects and sectarian ideologies. The three convert Muslims I interviewed during my fieldwork demonstrated very "general" Muslim identities without any reference to Islamic sects or sectarianism. In fact, they were mostly unaware of the different religious interpretations that exist. Upon further exploration, it seemed that most of them unknowingly practiced mainstream Sunni Islam, likely since the majority of the Muslims who I interviewed follow Sunni-Islam and would have therefore hold a greater influence.

In the third place, I determined that how my participants described their Muslim identities, and the interactions of these identities within the Canadian public sphere, is a more complex than simply identifying as "Canadian Muslim" or "Muslim Canadian". My findings show that even though religious freedom is protected by Canadian law, there are certain

situations that are limited or inadequate to some extent for Muslims practicing their religion and maintaining their religious identities as desired.

In the fourth place, I found that despite the fact that there is freedom of religion in Canada, Islamophobia exists in Canadian society and my participants reported being exposed to it both in online and offline spaces (see also Selby et al, 2018).

In the last place, I argued that although gender was an important consideration for Muslims in Canada in offline spaces (where they generally prefer to socialize with people of the same gender), gender was not a consideration in online interactions, where the majority of participants believed that gender segregation online was not possible. I also discovered that for the majority of my Canadian Muslim participants, depending on their religiosity, their belief in Islam was prominent in determining the way in which they interacted with cyberspaces. I also concluded that the Internet functions as a way of communication and a source of religious knowledge for Canadian Muslim that impacts their religious identities, but primarily indirectly. In other words, the Internet is far weaker in determining religiosity post-migration than active in-person engagement. My participants use the Internet and other digital technologies to support each other and discuss religious problems they encounter in their offline, daily lives. Significantly, the availability of mosques and other Islamic centers, and accessibility of imams and religious scholars held far greater significance in bolstering their religious lives. The Internet provides fast and easy access for Muslims to practice their religious identities in minority contexts but is less transformationally important in determining their post-migration religious lives.

Scope and Limitations

Although this study provides insight into (1) the ways in which online and offline spaces impact the formation of Muslim identities, and (2) how sectarianism and Islamic sects emerge in the lives of Muslims in contemporary Canada, this research for this thesis also faced a number of limitations.

First, because of the recruitment strategies utilized in this study, while diverse in many ways, most of my participants were either university students or university graduates holding at least a bachelor's degree. Thus, with the exception of three participants, my study's sample consisted of middle-class educated Muslims living in Canada. Because most of my participants had similar socio-economic backgrounds, I was not able to examine the role of different social classes in shaping Muslim identities related to the Internet in Canada. Second, given that there was a time constraint and the difficulty in accessing Muslims from different sectarian ideologies, I only interviewed one self-identified Shia Muslim and three Muslim converts during my fieldwork. I did not interview any Ismaili or Ahmadi Muslims. My sample mostly remained limited to Muslims who follow Sunni Islam. For that reason, I could not adequately address how belonging to Shia, Ismaili or an Ahmadi interpretation of Islam may impact the identity formation of Muslims living in Canada. It would be highly plausible to examine the everyday religious experiences of the participants from diverse sectarian groups in determining the influence of sectarianism on Muslim identities in Canada. Third, due to financial circumstances and time constraints, my fieldwork in Mississauga was limited to a Turkish community center. Thus, I did not have the occasion to observe Muslims from various ethnicities and religious movements in Mississauga, which is the most highly concentrated Muslim-populated city in

Canada. It would be highly plausible to examine and compare how Muslim community centers are shaped by different ethnic backgrounds and religious movements (e.g. a Pakistani Mosque, a Bosnian culture center, an African dominant mosque or a Saudi Arabia funded organization). Because of all the reasons mentioned above, the scope of this thesis is limited to understanding how middle class, educated Sunni Muslims define, describe and understand their Muslim identities in an ethnically and religiously diverse Canada.

Recommendations for Future Studies

This study constitutes a modest attempt to understand Muslim identities in offline and online spaces in the socio-religious and political context of Canada. Even though I discussed the reasons why there is a tendency among Muslims in Canada to label themselves as "Just Muslim" rather than claim belonging to any Muslim legal traditions, there is a need for a more extensive study to explore the internal and external factors that transform diverse Muslim identities into a single "Just Muslim" identity in Canada. I argue that this response may unintentionally privilege mainstream Wahhabi Islam in obscuring diversity within the traditions of Islam. Moreover, within the scope of this study, in particular, online spaces provided practical benefits for Muslims in their everyday Islamic practices. It is my hope that more scholars will further their studies on roles of cyberspaces in transforming Muslim identities to explore to what extent and on what grounds Islamic websites may serve in diminishing Islamic sects among Muslims living in Canada.

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Appendices

Appendix A : Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

(2014.09.27 VERSION)

INFO	QUESTION–TYPE
DEMOGRAPHICS - Age	1. How old are you ? 2. Where were you born ? 3. Where did you grow up ?
- Family	4. Where were your parents born (or lived before, if they immigrated) ? 5. When did your parents *[for immigrant parent]*, or you come to Canada ? 6. Why was Canada chosen ? 7. Do you have any brothers and sisters ? a. [If yes] Where are they born ? 8. What is the occupation of your parents ? 9. What is you marital status ? *[e.g. single, civil union, married, separated, divorced, any children]*
- Ethnicity	10. How would you describe your "ethnic" background ? *[e.g. Moroccan Berber, Pakistani, Indonesian, Egyptian, Iranian Kurd, etc.]*
- Religion	11. How would you describe your "religious" background / identity ? *[e.g. very religious, atheist, liberal, traditional, Salafi, etc.]*
- Nationality	12. Are you a long term or short term resident of Canada ? Can you specify ? *[e.g., Canadian citizen, permanent resident, international student, etc.]* 13. How long have you lived in Canada ? *[DO NOT SKIP this question for Canadian born participants, some of them may have lived outside Canada for few years]*
- Education	14. What is your highest education degree ? *[e.g. PhD, MA, BA, College degree, High School leaving certificate, other…]* 15. What kind of elementary and secondary school did you attend ?

- Employment	*[e.g. public school (or private non-Islamic school), home schooling, Islamic school]* - 16. Are you employed ? a. [If yes] What is your current occupation or profession ? b. [If no] Are you unemployed, unable to work, or a student ? i. [If student] In which field of study ?

INTERNET	17. Has your Internet usage increased, or decreased, in the last 5 years ? 18. On average, how many hours – per day, per week, per month – do you use the Internet ? *[e.g., including cell phone, checking emails, for work or study, etc.]* - 19. So, on the topic of what you do online, do you use the Internet for "religious" or "spiritual life"? a. [If yes] How is the Internet impacting, or affecting your "religious" or "spiritual" practices, beliefs, values, or attitudes ? - 20. Do your faith – beliefs and practices – affect how you use the Internet and what you do online ? 21. Do you have any faith-based limitations ? a. [If yes] In what ways ? i. Can you give some examples ? - 22. Do you think the Internet – (i) enhances your faith, (ii) operates more as a distraction or (iii) changes your faith in any way ? 23. For better or worse ? a. Can you explain or give examples ?
IDENTITY	24. What does it mean to you to be a Muslim living in Canada ? 25. How do you identify yourself, religiously and nationally ? Do you see yourself as a Canadian Muslim, a Muslim Canadian, or other ?

IDENTITY	26. Do you tend to have friends of the same "ethnic" or "religious" background as you, or not ? a. Any reasons why this might be so ? b. Has the circle of your offline friends changed as you grew older ? i. [If yes] In what ways ? c. Has the circle of online friends changed also ? i. [If yes] In what ways ? - - - - - - - - - - 27. Do you change your way of behaving depending on the "ethnic", or "cultural" background of the group of friends you are with ? a. What about when you are with Muslim *versus* non-Muslim friends ? b. How so ? c. What about online ? - - - - - - - - - - 28. Do you feel a generational, or cultural, or linguistic, or a religious gap with your parents ? How so ? *[young participants – e.g., act differently at home as compared to outside the home]* *[adults not living with parents – e.g., act differently in the presence of their parents or of elders of the family]* 29. Would you discuss with them all your online interests and activities? a. [If yes] Can you give examples of things you discuss or share with them ? b. [If no] Why not ? - - - - - - - - - - 30. Does gender play a role in how you socialize or do not socialize or interact with some people ? 31. Who do you socialize with ? a. Mainly with the same gender ? b. Any ethnic, religious, or intellectual preferences ? 32. Where do you socialize ? *[ex. parks, coffee shops, community centers, bars, mosques, etc.]* 33. If you wish to remain gender segregated, how is this maintained online ? 34. Do you find that online communities offer opportunities to find friends, companions, or a life partner / spouse ?

	a. Have you used online communities this way ? - 35. How has the Internet affected the way you feel connected to your Muslim and <u>non</u>-Muslim friends in Canada, or in other places ? a. [<u>If yes</u>] Which <u>online</u> communities or groups ? [*e.g., local, national or international – country or countries*] - 36. Does (i) information you find <u>online</u> and the (ii) communities or people you relate to <u>online</u> affect your religious practices and beliefs <u>**offline**</u> [*e.g., since childhood, in the past 5 years*] ? a. Can you explain or give examples ? - 37. Do you use online media in the <u>practice</u> your faith ? For example, for… a. buying religious goods [*e.g., for prayer rug, hijabs, etc.*] b. accessing religious literature [*e.g., for Qur'an recitation, religious sermons, scholars opinions concerning debatable issues, etc.*] c. using applications (Apps) regularly [*e.g. for the direction of prayer, the time to start fasting for Ramadan, etc.*]
<u>**AUTHORITY**</u> **Usage** **"Brand Names"**	38. Does your usage of the Internet include visiting a. sites to read the Qur'ân ? b. sites that deal with Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) ? c. hadith (prophetic sayings) search engines ? d. Islamic Blogs ? e. Arabic language instruction websites aiming to read the Qur'ân ? [*for <u>non</u> Arabic speakers*] - 39. How do you decide whether an "Islamic" site is authentic or appropriate, and that you can trust it ? 40. What signs do you look for to ensure it is authentic, or appropriate ? [e.g., *use of language, cited sources, logos, references to known scholars, known Qur'ânic verses (suras) or hadiths, website interface, links, etc.*] 41. What are the "Islamic" websites that have had the most influence on you, or that affected your beliefs and practices?

AUTHORITY	a. Can you give examples ? - 42. When you visit websites, are particular schools of jurisprudence (*madhhab*) important in your determination of their appropriateness ? *[**Sunnis:** Hanafi | Hanbali | Shafi'i | Maliki ||| **Shi'as:** Ja'fari | Ismaili | Zaidi]* *[<u>IMPORTANT to mention doctrines OTHER</u> than the one of participant, <u>because</u> Sunnis <u>might</u> state they are <u>open</u> to other interpretations -- i.e. other Sunni interpretations – <u>but not to</u> Shia, Ahmadi, or Sufi interpretations]* 43. If you attend a mosque – that is affiliated with a particular school of jurisprudence (*madhhab*,) – does it have an impact on your selection of Islamic websites ? a. [<u>*If no*</u>] Do you accept, or are you open to, all interpretations and doctrines? 44. What kind of information do you find most helpful in an <u>online</u> context ? *[e.g., in comparison with an offline engagements with your religious beliefs and practices]* 45. Are there certain situations or moments where <u>online</u> spaces offer better support, or Islamic information <u>than offline</u> spaces ? *[e.g., for more private matters, such as questions related to sex, alternative lifestyles, etc.]* - 46. What are your feelings encountering online interpretations that differ from, or conflict with your own beliefs or practices ? *[e.g., Shia, Sunni, secular interpretations, etc.]* - 47. What would you consider a radical or very conservative websites ? a. Have you encountered such radical or very conservative websites ? b. Do you think they are easily identifiable ? How ? c. How would you describe them ?
Fiqh for Minorities	48. If you seek out Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) <u>online</u>, do you believe that it should be interpreted for a Muslim minority context? 49. Or, do you see interpretation of religious texts, such as the Quran, hadith, and legal fatwas, as unchanging, irrespective of place, time, or context ?

	50. Have your opinions to this end changed in the last 5 years? a. [<u>If yes</u>] Has your usage of the Internet anything to do with that change ? - 51. Which scholars or thinkers do you feel are most important as sources of religious authority ? - 52. If you visit a Muslim website hosted in Canada – of a Scholar or an organization that is from Canada, have you <u>noted any differences</u> between so-called "local", or "national", and "non-Canadian", or "foreign" perspectives ? a. [<u>If yes</u>] can you describe how they differ in their presentation ?
<u>COMMUNITY</u> **General** **<u>COMMUNITY</u>**	53. What Muslim group or community do you affiliate yourself with ? [e.g. some would say they are affiliated with the "Maliki-Sunni", or with a "Sufi-humanist" community, etc.] 54. Is that because of family, friends, or personal choice? - 55. Do you belong to a religious group, or mosque – not necessarily through a formal membership, but where you regularly attend ? 56. How regularly do you attend? *[e.g., attend all activities, prayers, online community outings, etc.]* 57. What kinds of activities, if any, do you participate in <u>outside of</u> worship ? 58. How important is that community to you ? - 59. If you attend a mosque, does it use the Internet and how ? *[e.g., websites, chat rooms, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, etc.]*

	a. [<u>If yes</u>] Is it for internal communication with members, promoting your local mosque or group, or for correcting misinformation about Islam ? i. How might the usage of the Internet be improved ? ii. Anything the mosque can do better to improve their usage ? b. [<u>If no</u>] Why might that be so ? i. How might their usage be improved ? - 60. Is your Muslim community, or religious group, using the Internet adequately ? [*e.g., local Islamic organizations, Muslim associations, MSA, etc.*] a. [<u>If yes</u>] Can you explain how the Internet is used ? i. How might the usage of Internet be improved ? b. [<u>If no</u>] Why might that be so ? ii. How might their usage be improved ? -
Online interactivity **<u>COMMUNITY</u>**	61. Are the online groups to which your <u>offline</u> friends belong different from yours ? [*e.g. online forums, Facebook, chat rooms, etc.*] a. Why is this so? b. Can you give examples? - 62. Can you describe the type of activities in which you engage online with members of your group or faith community ? [*e.g. mosque, Muslim association, Muslim Student Associations (MSA), transnational group, etc.*] 63. How much do you contribute and interact with others online ? [*e.g., commenting, posting, sharing articles, etc.*] a. Do you use hashtags? [e.g. #Islam, #Canada, #Religion, #PBUH, #Muslim, #Cdnpoli, #Ramadan, #HumanRights, #Allah, #IslamisPeace, #deen, etc.] i. [If yes] Which hashtags do you use and how? - 64. Have you joined Islam related self-improvement activities ? [*e.g., weekend seminar, leadership seminars, etc.*]

	65. Have you taken any online ? a. [If yes] What did they consist of ? - 66. Have you ever changed some of your views before, or after joining a group, whether offline or online ? a. [If yes] Can you give examples ? - 67. How do you evaluate the quality of your time spent online ? [*e.g., with individuals or with groups*] 68. It is worth the time spent, or do you believe you are wasting too much time ?
***Online* community**	69. Has an online community or a religious group ever a. helped deepen your understanding of an issue, or b. given you some solidarity when you may have disagreed with the teachings of your faith community or family ? - 70. Have you found that the Internet has provided you with a faith community or a religious group that you otherwise might not have accessed ? a. Do you feel you share more or less with people online? b. Does anonymity help or hinder ? c. Have you ever moved on to meet others of an online group face-to-face ? - 71. Have you ever left an online community or a religious group ? a. [If yes] Why ? b. Were there any conflicts ?
DIVERSITY **Intra-religious dimensions**	72. Do you have Muslim friends who are from groups or communities other than the one to which you belong ? [*e.g. non-Sunnis IF you are a Sunni, etc.; how many, some / all*] 73. What about online ? 74. What kinds of issues are discussed with them online ? [*e.g., do you discuss beliefs, dogma, creationism, etc.*] 75. Are these similar or different from those discussed offline ?

	[e.g. diversity within Islam, differences between Islamic doctrines, etc.]
DIVERSITY **Intra-religious dimensions**	76. Do you avoid – either online or offline – any topics or websites ? a. [If yes] Why? - 77. What do you think about the different interpretations, different beliefs and practices within Islam and the Muslim communities ? *[e.g., Sunnis, Shi'as, Sufis, Ahmadis, Ismailis, Alevis, Alawiayya, Salafis, etc.]* - 78. What sources do you rely upon to inform you about diversity within Islam and the Muslim community ? *[e.g., mosque, family, friends, religious leaders, readings, the Qur'ân, the hadiths, etc.]* 79. And, what about the Internet ? *[e.g., websites of other Muslim groups, of religious scholars, social media, blogs, etc.]* 80. How often do you access information on other Muslim groups or doctrines on the Internet ? - 81. Have your beliefs or practices about differences that exist within Islam and the Muslim community changed in the last 5 years ? 82. And, why do you think that is ? 83. Has your Internet usage anything to do with this change ?
Inter-religious dimensions	84. Do you have friends who are non Muslim ? *[how many, some / all]* 85. What about online ? - 86. What do you think about living in a religiously plural society, and a society with secular values such as the Canadian society ? 87. What kinds of topics are discussed with your non-Muslim friends online about inter-religious diversity ?

<u>DIVERSITY</u> **Inter-religious dimensions**	88. Are these topics similar or different from those discussed with them <u>offline</u> ? 89. When you are with <u>non</u>-Muslims – either off or online – do you avoid any topics or websites ? a. [<u>If yes</u>] Why ? - 90. Have you been (i) involved in, or (ii) do you participate in any formal inter-faith groups or events – either inter-religious or intra-religious <u>offline</u> ? a. [<u>If yes</u>] can you explain and give examples ? 91. Have you (iii) accessed <u>online</u> interfaith groups or blogs? *[e.g., interfaith Facebook, blogs, online forums, etc.]* [<u>If yes</u>] a. How much of an influence do they have on your personal faith ? b. What about on your public practice ? c. Do you feel they deepen your faith, or that they trouble it ? - 92. What sources do you depend upon to inform you about people of other religions ? *[e.g., mosque, family, friends, religious leaders, readings, Qur'ân, hadiths*] 93. And what about the Internet ? *[ex. websites of non-Muslim religious groups, of non-Mulim religious scholars, social media, blogs, etc.*] 94. How often do you access information on groups of other faiths on the Internet ? *[e.g., always, often, rarely, never]* - 95. Have your beliefs or practices about differences between Muslims and <u>non</u>-Muslims changed in the last few years ? 96. <u>If</u> your beliefs or practices about those differences <u>have changed</u>, … a. Why do you think that is ? b. Has your usage of the Internet anything to do with it ?

<u>Recap Questions</u>	97. Is the influence of the Internet MORE or LESS importance than the influence of … *[rank according to importance]* i. religious leaders

	ii. religious text(s) iii. your parents/caregivers iv. your siblings v. your other relatives vi. your friends vii. printed media [*e.g. magazines, books, etc.*] viii. electronic media [*e.g., online TV, videos, audio*] ix. Other ? Please specify… - 98. How important are the Internet and digital technologies for you as a Muslim living in Canada ? 99. Can you explain further and give some examples ?
Additional Information	100. Is there anything else you would like to add – regarding your experience with the Internet and digital technologies as a Muslim living in Canada ?

Appendix B : Informed Consent Form

Title: New Muslim Public Spheres in the Digital Age: Identity, Community, Diversity and Authority in Canada.

Research Assistant: Mehmet Ali Basak
Department of Religious Studies
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, NL A1C 5S7
Email: mabasak@mun.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Selby
Department of Religious Studies
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, NL A1C 5S7
Email: jselby@mun.ca

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the supervisor, Jennifer Selby, if you have any questions about the study or for more information not included here before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future. **If you any ethical questions about this project please feel free to contact ICEHR if they have issues with the researcher, research or if you feel that you have been treated unfairly.**

Contact: ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Introduction
My name is Mehmet Ali Basak, I am a research assistant at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Dr. Jennifer Selby is an Associate Professor at Memorial University of Newfoundland. Her research focuses on contemporary Islam and secularism in France and in Canada. This research project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

This research aims to help foster a more complete understanding of Canadian Muslims' religious experiences that moves beyond fear and Islamophobia. In short, this project seeks to understand the modern Muslim experience in St. John's Newfoundland during the digital age.

Purpose of study:
The purpose of this study is to collect information on how digital technology and the Internet might shape Islam, how local Muslims are using the Internet, and what they are accessing online. The project will address this question through four related research areas: (1) sense of identity;
(2) sense of community; (3) sense of diversity; and (4) religious authority. Each of these four areas of research will pay particular attention to the impact of digital technology on women, youth, and religious leaders.

What you will do in this study:
Your participation consists of taking an individual semi-directed interview during which time you will be asked questions about your experience with digital technology and the Internet as a Canadian Muslim (or former Muslim). The interviews will be in English.

Length of time:
With your permission, the interview will be digitally recorded to ensure we do not misinterpret your statements. The interview should take between one to, no longer than, three hours of your time. The place and time of the interview are to be agreed upon by interviewer and interviewee.

Withdrawal from the study:
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary; this means that you are accepting to participate in this project without any obligation or external pressures. Moreover, you are under no obligation to answer any question. **You have the right to withdraw your participation, for any reason, without having to provide any justification for doing so. Upon your withdrawal all the information pertaining to you, which has been securely stored in locked filing cabinets of the university offices in the Religious Studies Department, will be immediately destroyed (unless you say otherwise).**

Your consent to participate in this project also means that you consent that the research team uses the collected data (see above, Anonymity and Confidentiality) for the purpose of this

research and the dissemination of research results (articles, theses, dissertations, conferences, scientific communications, books, etc.).

Possible benefits and risks:
Your participation will contribute to the advancement of our knowledge of the place digital technology and the Internet play in the lives of Canadian Muslims. We hope to gain a better understanding of the importance, the roles and the functions that digital technology and the Internet play in shaping Canadian Muslims' experiences and understanding of ethno-religious identities, communities, diversity and religious authority. Your contribution will help researchers and the general public to better understand Canadian Muslims' points of view.

Possible risks:
Your participation to this interview should not lead to any significant discomfort or harm. However, issues might revive unpleasant emotions associated with past experiences you may have had, in which cases, you remain free to refuse to answer any question that you may find uncomfortable, and this, without having to justify your refusal to answer. You should also know that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the questions we ask. **The Chairperson of Memorial's Ethics Committee can be reached at icehr@mun.ca or 709-864-2861.**

It is the responsibility of the interviewer to interrupt or terminate the interview, if the interviewer feels that your well-being is at stake. If this were the case, the interviewer would help you in finding useful resources to assist you. S**hould you require assistance in regards to your emotional state after participating in or during this research, you will be directed to the appropriate resources.**

The following services are available in St. John's:

24-hour mental health crisis line: 737-4668 (local) or 1-888-737-4668 (province-wide).
Mobile Crisis Response Team: 1-888-737-4668 St. John's Region.
Psychiatric Assessment Unit: 777-3021 or 777-3022 24 hour Walk-in Crisis Service at the Waterford Hospital Site on Waterford Bridge Rd.
Health Sciences Emergency Department on Columbus Drive in St. John's 777-6335.

Confidentiality
Information collected during the interview is confidential. Only members of the research team will have access to this data, i.e., (the recording and transcripts of your interview). Data that identifies participants will be preserved by research team co-applicants in a secured place separate from that of the files of digital audio recordings and transcripts of interviews and online questionnaires.

Anonymity:

Whatever you say will remain confidential. Nowhere will we identify you by name or by any other means. Only participants who have clearly stipulated in writing (in this consent form) that their name be mentioned could be identified (or left anonymous) in research outputs or research publications.

Recording and Storage of Data:

All collected data – i.e., files of digital audio recordings of interview, together with the files of transcripts and online questionnaires – will be put on external hard drives **and securely stored in locked filing cabinets of the university offices in the Religious Studies Department**. Data will be kept for a minimum of five years, as required by Memorial University policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research.*"*

Reporting of Results:

The data collected will be used in a Master's thesis and will use direct quotations but will not provide personally identifying information. **As mentioned above, this research project is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Insight Grants, as part of a nationwide study titled "New Muslim Public Spheres in the Digital Age: Identity, Community, Diversity and Authority in Canada" and the data collected will be published in their report.**

Sharing of Results with Participants:

All theses at Memorial University are available to the public once defended.

Questions:

You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact:

Dr. Jennifer Selby
Email: jselby@mun.ca or phone (709) 864-4046

ICEHR Approval Statement

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent:

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been able to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that you are free to withdraw from the study without having to give a reason and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- **If you choose to withdraw from the project, your information from you will be destroyed.**

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

Your signature:

☐ I have read what this study is about and understood the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.

☐ I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation.

(please circle if you agree)

I agree to be audio-recorded during the interview **Yes** **No**

I agree to the use of quotation **Yes** **No**

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____ _____

Signature of participant Date

Researcher's Signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

_____ _____

Signature of Research Assistant Date

Appendix C : Recruitment Poster

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Department of Religious Studies

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR A STUDY OF

CANADIAN MUSLIMS AND THE INTERNET

We are looking for Canadian Muslim participants (over 18 years of age) to take part in a study on the role of the Internet and digital technologies in the lives of Canadian Muslims.

As a participant in this study, you would agree to be interviewed about your use of the Internet and its impact on the related issues of identity, community, (intra-/inter-religious) diversity, and religious authority.

Your participation is voluntary and would involve a semi-directed interview.

contact:

Mehmet Ali Basak – M.A. Candidate

(709) 771-0840

Email: mbasak@mun.ca

Dr. Jennifer Selby - Supervisor

Associate Professor of Religious Studies

(709) 864-4046

Email: jselby@mun.ca

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research, such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant, you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Appendix D : Ethics Approval

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)

St. John's, NL Canada A1C 5S7
Tel: 709 864-2561 icehr@mun.ca
www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr

ICEHR Number:	**20192173-AR**
Approval Period:	November 19, 2018 – November 30, 2019
Funding Source:	SSHRC (RGCS: 20140845; PI: Selby)
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Jennifer Selby Department of Religious Studies
Title of Project:	*The Formation of Muslim Canadian Identities in putatively Secular and Pluralist Offline and Online Spaces*

Title of Parent Project:	*New Muslim Public Spheres in the Digital Age: Identity, Community, Diversity, and Authority in Canada.*
ICEHR Number:	*20140938*

November 19, 2018

Mr. Mehmet Ali Basak
Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Mr. Basak:

Thank you for your submission to the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) seeking ethical clearance for the above-named research project. The Committee has reviewed the proposal and agrees that the proposed project is consistent with the guidelines of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2). *Full ethics clearance* is *granted to* November 30, 2019. ICEHR approval applies to the ethical acceptability of the research, as per Article 6.3 of the *TCPS2*. Researchers are responsible for adherence to any other relevant University policies and/or funded or non-funded agreements that may be associated with the project.

The *TCPS2* **requires** that you submit an Annual Update to ICEHR before November 30, 2019. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance and include a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer involves contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you are **required** to provide an annual update with a brief final summary and your file will be closed. If you need to make changes during the project which may raise ethical concerns, you must submit an Amendment Request with a description of these changes for the Committee's consideration prior to implementation. If funding is obtained subsequent to approval, you must submit a Funding and/or Partner Change Request to ICEHR before this clearance can be linked to your award.

All post-approval event forms noted above can be submitted from your Researcher Portal account by clicking the ***Applications: Post-Review*** link on your Portal homepage. We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Russell J. Adams, Ph.D.
Chair, Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research
Professor of Psychology and Pediatrics
Faculties of Science and Medicine

RA/lw

cc: Supervisor – Dr. Jennifer Selby, Department of Religious Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Director, Research Grant and Contract Services